

The Fragmented Body and the Artwork of Berlinde De Bruyckere
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The Fragmented Body and the Artwork of Berlinde De Bruyckere

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to Markus and Norma

with love

Abstract

This thesis examines, from an affective and art historical perspective, the sculptural practice of Berlinde De Bruyckere, positioning her fragmented figures in the context of contemporary art debates and exploring the role of the artist in changing the visual representation of the body fragment.

De Bruyckere's fragmented figures, often inspired by actual events and problems, reflect on art, as well as on what transcends it, in order to highlight deeper issues within humanity. Therefore, I argue that through the capacity of the body fragment, as a way of magnifying and drawing attention to the edge of the human condition, Berlinde De Bruyckere's sculptures convey both the fluidity between the psychological inner life and the physical exteriority, as well as other existential concerns.

By looking closely at De Bruyckere's artwork from 2004-2013, this research shows how the viewers' reception of the body fragments presented in De Bruyckere's sculptures, is particularly related to an embodied form of perception, evoking a multitude of physical and emotional reactions. De Bruyckere's representations of the body as vulnerable and fragmented, engage the spectator through abjection as well as through compassionate empathy, which in turn heightens intra-subjective awareness through affective knowledge. The investigation highlights the profound influence that feminist scholars and artists had in opening up the opportunities available to artists today. I will particularly focus upon feminism's impact in shaping the representation and perception of the body, as well as the important, yet often forgotten, contribution of female artists in shaping contemporary art discourses through materiality.

The Fragmented Body and the Artwork of Berlinde De Bruyckere

Table of Contents

Title Page	1
Dedication	2
Abstract	3
List of Contents	4
List of Illustrations	6
Acknowledgements	13
Author's Declaration	14
1 Introduction	15-28
1.1 Aims	15
1.2 Methodology	18
1.3 Contribution to Knowledge	20
1.4 Definitions	22
1.4.1 The Body	22
1.4.2 Pain, Suffering and Trauma	23
1.4.3 Postmodernism	25
1.5 Outline	26
2 Literature Review	29-66
2.1 Fragmentation: 'The Whole is the False'	30
2.2 The Fragmented Self	35
2.3 The Feminist Perspective	40
2.4 Un/Shareable Human Emotions	43
2.5 The Embodied Self: Rethinking Subjectivity	48
2.6 Sensing Sculpture	51
2.7 Sexual Difference	55
3 Sensing Sculpture	67-101
3.1 Thinking through all the Senses	68
3.1.1 Compassionate Empathy	71
3.2 Getting in Touch with the World	72
3.2.1 Realistic Representation	72
3.2.2 Embodied Sculpture	74
3.2.3 The Smothering Mother	78
3.3 The Logic of Matter	81
3.3.1 Fabric: Visible Memories	82
3.3.1.1 Memory of Touch	83
3.3.2 The Fabric of a 'Material History': Wax a Reperception?	85
3.4 The Process – Casting	94
4 Body Fragmentation and the Artwork of Berlinde De Bruyckere	102-146
4.1 Berlinde De Bruyckere: The 1990s	102

4.2	From Wholeness to Body Fragmentation	110
4.3	Berlinde De Bruyckere: The 2000s	117
4.4	Transitional Objects	118
4.5	The Animal Body	129
4.6	Beyond the Single Body	132
4.7	Space and Time	133
4.7.1	Site Specificity as Content	136
5	Lingering on the Threshold: Ambiguity in the Work of Berlinde De Bruyckere	147-176
5.1	The Presence of Absence: The Uncanny	148
5.2	Absence of Presence: The Eerie in Berlinde De Bruyckere's Figures	151
5.3	From Desire to Suffering	157
5.4	The Representation of Absence	169
6	Time Continuity: Christian and Art Historical References in Berlinde De Bruyckere	177-223
6.1	Continuity and Repetition	178
6.1.1	The Pietà	179
6.1.2	The Return of the Religious or the 'Postmodern Sacred'	188
6.2	Reverence	191
6.3	Time Continuity	195
6.3.1	Past Perfect: The Knowledge of the Past	196
6.3.2	The Crucifixion	199
6.3.3	The Man of Sorrows	201
6.3.4	The Dialogue with Tradition	205
6.3.5	Present Perfect: Pier Paolo Pasolini	209
6.3.6	The Present	220
7	The Silenced Others	224-257
7.1	Yara the Wound	226
7.2	Healed Wounds	229
7.3	The Materiality of the Invisible	232
7.4	The Wound as Female	238
7.5	Guilty Pleasure: The Representation of the Androgynous Body in Berlinde De Bruyckere.	242
7.5.1	Gynandros or 'Shared Feminine'?	245
7.6	Multiple Normativities?	250
8	Conclusion	258-266
	Appendix	
	Berlinde De Bruyckere: Solo and Group Exhibitions	267-277
	Bibliography	278-331

List of Illustrations

Image (3-1): De Bruyckere, B. (2010). *Pillow*. [image]. Available from <https://www.accaonline.org.au/sites/default/files/BerlindeDeBruyckereEducationkit.pdf> [Accessed 13 August 2013].

Image (3-2): Hovnanian, R. L. (2016). *Perfect Baby Showroom*. [image]. Available from <http://www.rachellehovnanian.com/perfect-baby-showroom/jwrap3i148a7b5w8c4p2u34kskd7jo> [Accessed 09.01.2015].

Image (3-3): De Bruyckere, B. (1999). *Sprekken*. [image]. Available from <http://www.muhka.be/fr/toont/event/117/Berlinde-De-Bruyckere-en-alles-is-aann-genaaid/> [Accessed 14.08.2014].

Image (3-4): Isaacs, J. (2002). *Thinking about It*. [image]. Available from http://johnisaacs.net/press_files/Didi_Bozzini.pdf [Accessed 10 March 2015].

Image (3-5): Zumbo, G. G. (1656-1701). *Anatomical Wax Head*. [image]. Available from <http://www.allaprimaworkshop.com/index.php/main/florence/> [Accessed 10 March 2015].

Image (3-6): 18th Century. *Wax Anatomical female Head exhibited at the Welcome Collection, London*, [image]. Available from <http://morbidanatomy.blogspot.co.uk/2008/09/vanitas-figure-welcome-collection.html> [Accessed 15 March 2015].

Image (3-7): De Bruyckere, B. (2009-2010). *Etten Kemiktemiz* [image]. De Bruyckere, B. 2012. In Ansen, S. and De Bruyckere, B. (2012). *Yara, The wound*, Istanbul: Arter, p71.

Image (3-8): Duchamp, M. (1959). *With My Tongue in My Cheek*. [image]. Available from <http://www.wikiart.org/en/marcel-duchamp/with-my-tongue-in-my-cheek-1959> [Accessed 02 March 2015].

Image (3-9): De Bruyckere, B. (2010). *Detail of Into One Another I to P.P.P.* [image]. Available from <http://cloud.hauserwirth.com/documents/E2taHtFyqV2MU14e667JutjHMIYPMEA5Vc8656CW02HSQS2ij6/large/into-one-another-i-detail-2-3WI764.jpg> [Accessed 05 February 2015].

Image (4-1): De Bruyckere, B. (1999). *Slaapzaal III, Blankets and wood, Installation view, Begijnhof, Hasselt, Belgium*. [image]. Available from <http://www.hauserwirth.com/artists/6/berlinde-de-bruyckere/images-clips/161/> [Accessed 05 July 2013].

Image (4-2): De Bruyckere, B. (1996). *The Zone*. [image]. Available from <http://www.ivarhagendoorn.com/blog/2005/01/31/berlinde-de-bruyckere-retrospective> [Accessed 05 July 2013].

Images (4-3a): Crew Center (2015). *Island Princess rescues boat with Syrian refugees in the Ionian Sea* [image]. Available from <http://www.crew-center.com/island-princess-rescues-boat-syrian-refugees-ionian-sea> [Accessed 28 July 2015].

Image (4-3b): Reuters (2015). *Refugee landings in Lesbos ease as storm approaches and deaths mount*. [image]. Available from <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-europe-migrants-greece-lesbos-idUSKCN0RL0P020150921> [Accessed 21 September 2015].

Image (4-4): De Bruyckere, B. (1993). *Dekenhuis, Ijze en Denkens*. [image]. Available from http://users.telenet.be/Pro-arte/artists/berlinde_debruyckere/idx.html [Accessed 12 July 2013].

Image (4-5): De Bruyckere, B. (1993). *Dekenhuis*. [image]. Available from http://users.telenet.be/Pro-arte/artists/berlinde_debruyckere/idx.html [Accessed 17 July 2013].

Image (4-6): De Bruyckere, B. (1989). *Kooi*. [image]. Available from <http://www.verbekefoundation.com/berlinde-de-bruyckere/> [Accessed 17 July 2013].

Image (4-7): De Bruyckere, B. (1991). *I Never Promised You a Rosegarden*. [image]. Available from http://www.dbnl.org/tekst/_low001200201_01/_low001200201_01_0034.php [Accessed 24 July 2013].

Image (4-8): De Bruyckere, B. (2009). *Detail II*. [image]. In Ansen, S & De Bruyckere, B. 2012. *Yara, The wound*, Istanbul: Arter, p57.

Image (4-9): De Bruyckere, B. (2005). Installation view, Maison Rouge, Paris, France. [image]. Available from <http://www.hauserwirth.com/artists/6/berlinde-de-bruyckere/images-clips/139/> [Accessed 21 June 2013].

Image (4-10): De Bruyckere, B. (2010). *Pillow*. [image]. Available from <https://www.accaonline.org.au/sites/default/files/BerlindeDeBruyckereEducationkit.pdf> [Accessed 13 August 2013].

Image (4-11): De Bruyckere, B. (2002). *Zonder*. [image]. Available from <http://www.galleriacontinua.com/artist/5/artpieces> [Accessed 07 September 2013].

Image (4-12): De Bruyckere, B. (2003). *Zonder*. [image]. Available from <http://carolienvandenakker.nl/collega-uitgevallen-zo-kun-je-hem-ondersteunen/> [Accessed 30 August 2013].

Image (4-13): Bourgeois, L. (2002). *Knife Figure*. [image]. Available from <http://artblart.com/tag/louise-bourgeois-knife-figure/> [Accessed 15 March 2015].

Image (4-14): De Bruyckere, B. (2003-2004). *Wezen*. [Image]. Available from <http://www.hauserwirth.com/artists/6/berlinde-de-bruyckere/images-clips/152/> [Accessed 09. December 2013].

Image (4-15): Bourgeois, L. (2001). *Seven in a Bed*. [image]. Available from <http://louisebourgeois.yolasite.com/gallery.php> [Accessed 15 March 2015].

Image (4-16): Bourgeois, L. (1997). *Couple IV*. [image]. Available from <http://arttattler.com/archivebourgeois.html> [Accessed 15 March 2015].

Image (4-17): De Bruyckere, B. (2010). *Into One-Another III To P.P.P.* [image]. Available from <http://whitehotmagazine.com/articles/interview-with-berlinde-de-bruyckere/2239> [Accessed 01 December 2013].

Image (4-18): De Bruyckere, B. (2000). In Flanders Fields. [image]. Available from <http://www.muhka.be/nl/toont/event/2051/Een-verhaal-van-het-beeld> [Accessed 01. September 2013].

Image (4-19): (1917). *Dead Horses, Ypres, Belgium*. [image]. <http://www.slideshare.net/fluffy22/ww1-the-western-front> [Accessed 05 February 2015].

Image (4-20): De Bruyckere, B. (2010). *Inside me*. [image]. Available from <http://www.hauserwirth.com/exhibitions/668/berlinde-de-bruyckere/list-of-works/7/> [Accessed 10 June 2013].

Image (4-21): De Bruyckere, B. (2003-2004). *Eén*. [image]. Available from http://www.depont.nl/collectie/kunstenaars/kunstenaar/werk_id/535/kunstenaar/bruyckere/ [Accessed October 2013].

Image (4-22): De Bruyckere, B. (2009). *We are all Flesh*. [image]. Available from <http://www.hauserwirth.com/artists/6/berlinde-de-bruyckere/images-clips/112/> [Accessed December 2013].

Image (4-23): De Bruyckere, B. (2011). *Installation View, 'Mysterium Leib. Berlinde De Bruyckere im Dialog mit Cranach und Pasolini'*, Kunstmuseum, Bern. [image]. Available from <http://www.hauserwirth.com/artists/6/berlinde-de-bruyckere/images-clips/87/> [Accessed 02 January 2014].

Image (4-24): De Bruyckere, B. (2011). *Inside Mel II*. [image]. Available from <http://www.hauserwirth.com/artists/6/berlinde-de-bruyckere/images-clips/91/> [Accessed 06 December 2013].

Image (5-1): De Bruyckere, B. (2008). *Marthe*. [image]. Available from http://www.saatchigallery.com/artists/berlinde_debruyckere.htm [Accessed 20 September 2013].

Image (5-2): De Bruyckere, B. (2012). *Liggende I*. [image]. Available from <http://www.hauserwirth.com/exhibitions/1628/berlinde-de-bruyckere-three-sculptures/list-of-works/2/> [Accessed 27 November 2014].

Image (5-3): De Bruyckere, B. (2012). *Liggende II*. [image]. Available from <http://www.hauserwirth.com/exhibitions/1628/berlinde-de-bruyckere-three-sculptures/list-of-works/3/> [Accessed 27 November 2014].

Image (5-4): Gober, R. (1991-1993). *Untitled*. [image]. Available from <http://www.art-magazin.de/kunst/7168-rtkl-robert-gober-new-york-das-rattengift-griffbereit> [Accessed 05 August 2013].

Image (5-5): Antoni, J. (1993). Lick and Lather. [image]. Available from <http://www.artnews.com/2013/02/21/chocolate-self-portraits-by-janine-antoni-and-dieter-rot/> [Accessed 05 August 2013].

Image (5-6): De Bruyckere, B. (2012). Actaeon. [image]. Available from <http://www.hauserwirth.com/artists/6/berlinde-de-bruyckere/images-clips/70/> [Accessed 03 December 2014].

Image (5-7): De Bruyckere, B. (2012). Three Sculptures. [image]. Available from http://ex-chamber-memo5.up.n.seesaa.net/ex-chamber-memo5/image/8Berlinde_De_Bruyckere.jpg?d=a1 [Accessed 09 December 2014].

Image (6-1): De Bruyckere, B. (2008). *Pietà*. [image]. Available from <http://www.artslant.com/global/artists/show/20187-berlinde-de-bruyckere?tab=ARTWORKS> [Accessed 22 March 2015].

Image (6-2): Cranach, L. (1510). *Pietà Beneath the Cross*. [image]. Available from https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Lucas-cranach-Pietà_beneath_the_Cross.jpg [Accessed 22 March 2015].

Image (6-3): Buonarroti, M. (1564). *La Pietà Rondanini*. [image]. Available from https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pietà_Rondanini#/media/File:Michelangelo_pietà_rondanini.jpg [Accessed 24 March 2015].

Image (6-4): De Bruyckere, B. (2007). *Pietà*. [image]. Available from <http://www.sothebys.com/en/auctions/ecatalogue/lot.58.html/2015/contemporary-art-evening-auction-115022> [Accessed 29 March 2015].

Image (6-5): Buonarroti, M. (1498-1499). *Pietà*. [image]. Available from [https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Römische_Pietà#/media/File:Michelangelo%27s_Pietà,_St_Peter%27s_Basilica_\(1498-99\).jpg](https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Römische_Pietà#/media/File:Michelangelo%27s_Pietà,_St_Peter%27s_Basilica_(1498-99).jpg) [Accessed 30 March 2015].

Image (6-6): Pasolini, P.P. (1964). *Il Vangelo Secondo Matteo*. *YouTube*. Available from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h7ewh5k5-gY> [Accessed 09 April 2015].

Image (6-7): De Bruyckere, B. (2007-2008). *Pietà*. [image]. Available from <http://www.hauserwirth.com/artists/6/berlinde-de-bruyckere/images-clips/118/> [Accessed 17 March 2015].

Image (6-8): Aranda, S. (2011). *Winner of the 2011's World Press Photo*. [image]. Available from http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/02/10/world-press-photo-new-york-times-samuel-aranda_n_1268630.html [Accessed 25 March 2015].

Image (6-9): Serrano, A. (1987). *Piss Christ*. [image]. Available from [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Piss_Christ#/media/File:Piss_Christ_by_Serrano_Andres_\(1987\).jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Piss_Christ#/media/File:Piss_Christ_by_Serrano_Andres_(1987).jpg) [Accessed 03 April 2015].

Image (6-10): *Chris Ofili's 'Holy Virgin Mary' being sprayed with white paint by retired teacher Dennis Heiner in New York in 1999*. [image]. Available from <http://blog.arthistoryabroad.com/tag/westminster-abbey/> [Accessed 11 March 2015].

Image (6-11): De Bruyckere, B. (2009). *Per Benedetto*. [image]. Available from <http://voorlinden.nl/nl/nieuws/4> [Accessed 22 March 2015].

Image (6-12): Da Maiano, B. (1501-1504). *Il Crocifisso di Benedetto da Maiano*. [image]. Available from <http://www.firenzetoday.it/cronaca/crocifisso-benedetto-maiano-duomo-foto.html> [Accessed 11 March 2015].

Image (6-13): De Bruyckere, B. (2009). *Per Benedetto*. [image]. Available from <http://www.galleriacontinua.com/artist/5/artpieces> [Accessed 27 March 2015].

Image (6-14 and 6-15): De Bruyckere, B. (2004-2005). *Jelle Luipaard*. [image]. Available from <http://www.hauserwirth.com/artists/6/berlinde-de-bruyckere/images-clips/154/> [Accessed 30 March 2015].

Image (6-16): De Bruyckere, B. (2006). *Schmerzensmann IV*, [image]. Available from <http://www.welt.de/kultur/kunst-und-architektur/article146891856/Aengstigt-euch-nicht-es-ist-nur-Gott.html> [Accessed 15 March 2015].

Image (6-17): Cranach, L. (circa 1515). *Ecce Homo*, [image]. Available from [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Lucas_Cranach_d.Ä._-_Christus_als_Schmerzensmann_\(Kunstsammlungen_Böttcherstraße,_Bremen\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Lucas_Cranach_d.Ä._-_Christus_als_Schmerzensmann_(Kunstsammlungen_Böttcherstraße,_Bremen).jpg) [Accessed 04 April 2015].

Image (6-18): De Bruyckere, B. (2006). *Schmerzensmann*. [image]. Available from <http://www.hauserwirth.com/exhibitions/34/berlinde-de-bruyckere-schmerzensmann/list-of-works/5/> [Accessed 04 April 2015].

Image (6-19): De Bruyckere, B. (2006). *Installation view, 'Schmerzensmann', Hauser & Wirth London, Piccadilly*, [image]. Available from http://www.hauserwirth.com/artists/images-clips-view/?artist_id=6&a=berlinde-de-bruyckere&p=131 [Accessed 05 April 2015].

Image (6-20): Cranach, L. (ca 1501). Detail of Kreuzigung Christi. [image]. Available from [https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kreuzigungsgruppe#/media/File:Lucas_Cranach_d.Ä._-_Kreuzigung_Christi_\(Kunsthistorisches_Museum_Wien\).jpg](https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kreuzigungsgruppe#/media/File:Lucas_Cranach_d.Ä._-_Kreuzigung_Christi_(Kunsthistorisches_Museum_Wien).jpg) [Accessed 28 March 2015].

Image (6-21): De Bruyckere, B. (2010). *Into One-Another II To P.P.P.* [image]. Available from <http://www.hauserwirth.com/exhibitions/899/berlinde-de-bruyckere-into-one-another-to-p-p-p/list-of-works/6/> [Accessed 12 April 2015].

Image (6-22): Pasolini, P.P. (1964). *Il Vangelo secondo Matteo*. *YouTube*. Available from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h7ewh5k5-gY> [Accessed 09 April 2015].

Image (6-23): De Bruyckere, B. (2010-2011). *Into One Another I to P.P.P.* [image]. Available from <http://www.sleek-mag.com/2015/01/13/berlinde-de-bruyckere-retrospective-at-s-m-a-k-review/> [Accessed 29 March 2015].

Image (6-24): Pasolini, P.P. (1968) *Teorema*. *Youtube*. Available from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qE35w6ddCmQ> [Accessed 12 April 2015].

Image (6-25): De Bruyckere, B. (2010-2011). *Into One-Another III to P.P.P.* [image]. Available from <http://kultur-online.net/?q=node/17861> [Accessed 17 April 2015].

Image (6-26): De Bruyckere, B. (2004). *Innocence can be Hell. Series Jelle Luienaar*. [image]. Available from <http://fernandavalente.weebly.com/berlinde-de-bruyckere.html> [Accessed 19 April 2015].

Image (6-27): Iraq (2004). *Killings of four Blackwater security contractors in Fallujah in March 2004*. [image]. Available from <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/warriors/contractors/highrisk.html> [Accessed 24 April 2015].

Image (7-1): De Bruyckere, B. (2011-2012). *Yara*. [image]. Available from <http://istanbulsergifotografari.com/2012/08/03/berlinde-de-bruyckere/> [Accessed 23 June 2015].

Image (7-2): De Bruyckere, B. (2011-2012). *Yara III, The Wound*. [image]. Available from <http://www.hauserwirth.com/artists/6/berlinde-de-bruyckere/images-clips/77/> [Accessed 29 June 2015].

Image (7-3): Andriomenos, N. (ca 1890). *Photographic Album: Ovarian Cancer Surgery*. [image]. In Ansen, S. and De Bruyckere, B. (2012). *Yara, The wound*, Istanbul: Arter

Image (7-4): Andriomenos, N. (ca 1890). *Photographic Album: Gynaecological procedure*. [image]. In Ansen, S. and De Bruyckere, B. (2012). *Yara, The wound*, Istanbul: Arter

Image (7-5): Collishaw, M. (1988). *Bullet Hole*. [image]. Available from http://www.saatchigallery.com/artists/artpages/mat_collishaw_bullet_hole.htm [Accessed 15 October 2015].

Image (7-6): De Bruyckere, B. (2011-2012). *Detail of Yara I*. [image]. In Ansen, S. and De Bruyckere, B. (2012). *Yara, The wound*, Istanbul: Arter

Image (7-7): De Bruyckere, B. (2006). *Schmerzensmann*. [image]. Available from <http://www.hauserwirth.com/exhibitions/34/berlinde-de-bruyckere-schmerzensmann/list-of-works/5/> [Accessed 04 April 2015].

Image (7-8): Caravaggio. (1601-1602). Detail. *The incredulity of Saint Thomas*. [image]. Available from [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Incredulity_of_Saint_Thomas_\(Caravaggio\)#/media/File:Caravaggio_-_The_Incredulity_of_Saint_Thomas.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Incredulity_of_Saint_Thomas_(Caravaggio)#/media/File:Caravaggio_-_The_Incredulity_of_Saint_Thomas.jpg) [Accessed 01 July 2015].

Image (7-9): (1349). *The Side Wound of Christ* from the Psalter and Hours of Bonne of Luxembourg. [image]. Available from <http://cargocollective.com/lizlorenz/writing-1/Christ-s-Womanly-Wounds> [Accessed 03 July 2015].

Image (7-10): De Bruyckere, B. (2004-2005). *Jelle Luipaard*. [image]. Available from <http://www.hauserwirth.com/artists/6/berlinde-de-bruyckere/images-clips/154/> [Accessed 30 March 2015].

Image (7-11): De Bruyckere, B. (2008). *Marthe*. [image]. Available from <http://www.artnet.com/artists/berlinde-de-bruyckere/marthe-a-TO0uqyLMVJiP99l8cQJo3w2> [Accessed 17 September 2015].

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Author's Declaration

I declare that all the material contained in this thesis is my own work unless otherwise indicated through the use of a clear referencing system.

1 Introduction

This thesis explores the sculptural practice of the Belgian artist, Berlinde De Bruyckere, positioning her fragmented figures within contemporary western art debates and defining her role in changing the perception and visual representation of the fragmented body from an affective and art historical perspective. De Bruyckere's artwork, created between 2004 and 2013, functions as both a framework and a catalyst for a critical discussion on the 'un/shareability' of emotions, such as: loneliness, loss, pain and suffering, through art. The thesis shows how her fragmented figures can potentially engage viewers through abjection or empathy and at the same time point to the limitations of these notions. Additionally, the research pays particular attention to the role played by sexual difference in the critical reception of De Bruyckere's artwork.

1.1 Aims

The fragmented body has been an important form of representation in western contemporary art since the 1960s. However, during the last thirty years, the way in which artists have utilised the body in its fragmented form has shifted. Indeed, alongside the interpretation of body fragmentation as traumatic and vulnerable, there has been a noticeable increase in artworks that focus on the fragmented figure as a way of expressing the fluidity and multiplicity of the self. De Bruyckere's artwork, as will be shown, reflects these changes. Her fragmented figures draw attention to the innumerable events and encounters that collectively form and shape every individual, expanding subjectivity beyond the subject itself to include 'otherness' within. De Bruyckere's sculptures can convey both the fluidity between the psychological inner life and the physical exteriority, as well as human existential issues such as: fear, loneliness, pain, anger, loss, vulnerability, mortality and desire.

Positioning De Bruyckere's fragmented figures as a vehicle with which to visually express existential questions and to convey physical and psychological pain, initiates a debate on the apparent contradiction between the need of some artists, at the very beginning of the twenty-first century to address what human beings share. My hypothesis is that, her artwork represents a possible way of widening the discourses on the representation of various emotional states and this will open up alternative ways of thinking about the representation of these experiences.

In the discussion about the social variability of human emotions, there is on one hand, a tendency among scholars of different fields to either completely obscure the role played by society and consider human emotions as universal; on the other hand to describe them as completely socially constructed. I argue that some human emotions can be shared, even though it may not be possible to fully name them through language. I, therefore, position the concept of ‘shared emotions’ somewhere in between the universal biological account and the cultural relativistic account of human emotions, exploring the possibility of communicating and sharing emotional content through art; even though the underlying experience may be lived out differently on a personal level and depends largely upon the socio-cultural context. This investigation, therefore, recognises the possibility of a space in which the ‘shareability’ of personal experiences is enhanced through art.

The communication of pain and emotion across / between bodies, and the exploration of their possible mediation, is a central theme of my investigation. Looking at De Bruyckere’s artwork from 2004 to 2013, I propose that mediation between the suffering subject, the artifact and the spectator is possible through a heightened bodily and affective engagement by the viewer. I contend that in her artworks subject matter form, materials, sculptural process, references and presentation, all contribute to the enhancement of the spectators’ bodily involvement and, therefore, can resonate on an emotional level with many spectators.

Taking as her initial vocabulary the suffering body of Christ, the Saints and the Martyrs, De Bruyckere uses Christian iconography as a visual language that is available to a wide western audience. Yet, scholars of religious art are mainly concerned with spiritual and aesthetical matters or ‘transgressive’ content.¹ This research, however, shows that non-transgressive references to ‘religious imagery’, as in the work of, Berlinde De Bruyckere, can be made contemporary in order to comment on the modern system of values and conventions, as well as render human suffering more accessible through a well-known iconographic subtext.

¹ Elkins, J. (2004), *On the Strange Place of Religion in Contemporary Art*. New York: Routledge & Abington. Heller, E. (2004), *Reluctant Partners: Art and Religion in Dialogue*. New York: The Gallery at the American Bible Society. Burns, P.C. (ed), (2007), *Jesus in Twentieth-Century Literature, Art and Movies*. New York and London: Continuum. Morgan, D. (2005), *The Sacred Gaze: Religious Visual Culture in Theory and Practice*. Berkeley: University of California Press. Casey, D. (2004), Sacrifice, Piss Christ and Liberal Excess. *Arts and Opinion*, 3(3). Available from http://www.artsandopinion.com/2004_v3_n3/pisschrist.htm [Accessed: 20.08.2014]. Casey, M., Fisher, A. and Ramsay, H. (2004), Sacrifice, Piss Christ and Liberal Excess: The Rebuttal. *Arts and Opinion*, 3(4). Available from http://www.artsandopinion.com/2004_v3_n4/pisschrist-2.htm [Accessed 22.08.2014].

The representation of the human body fragmented and in pain may recall a multitude of histories and events, both personal and collective. From personal physical and/or psychic pain, to the suffering of the victims of natural or man-made disasters, the representation of the ‘body in pain’ is often deployed as an ethical support for political and military actions. This investigation, although it acknowledges that human suffering is always contingent to personal, social and cultural backgrounds, also supports the possibility of an affective communication between those suffering and the ones witnessing it, questioning in part, the anti-essentialist and anti-humanist stance of postmodernism. Moreover, the affective communication between victims / sufferers and witnesses foregrounds the important role of ‘the visual’ in the debates over the possibility of conveying pain and suffering.² Arguing that De Bruyckere’s artwork contributes to the creation of an in-between space in which suffering can be made more legible has several ethical consequences, positioning this inquiry in the realm of the political.

Even though this research aims to be multi-disciplinary and uses concepts and theories from different fields of practice, I am aware of the limits of such an endeavour. Indeed, the results of this research have been strongly influenced by my location in the United Kingdom and by my own subjectivity and interests.

My choice to concentrate on De Bruyckere’s body of work relies on the recognition that the artist seeks a contemporary form with which to express visually the contradiction of human existence. Her figures do not only highlight our own inherent vulnerability, but also, as Judith Butler puts it, they draw attention to the fact “that others can be injured, that we are subject to death at the whim of another...” (Butler, J. 2006: xii). Additionally, through her references, De Bruyckere also bridges the gap between art history and contemporary culture. She does not only employ the postmodern practice of citation, but also refers to the contemporary fascination with the ‘biopolitical’, the pathological knowledge and the aestheticisation of violence in art and the mass media. My objective, however, is not to locate and reduce her artwork to a particular historical list of styles and past influences, or to present her artwork as the answer to the countless physical, moral and ethical problems we may encounter when confronted with the representation of the suffering body. My goals are rather to draw attention to the implications of these representations and to show how her artwork expands on the existing ideas surrounding the fragmented body, which points to an

² In fact, in De Bruyckere’s fragmented and open bodies, pain and trauma become both a collective and a private matter, highlighting in this way, the important role of art in shifting attention through affect from the ‘pain of the other’ to a shared suffering and responsibility (Sontag, S. 2004). Moreover, our ethical framework has a strong correlation to our experience and understanding of the suffering of the body.

undetermined and uncertain human condition by thrusting the ‘attentive’ spectator into an uncharted in-between space in which the boundaries between the known and the unknown become blurred.

1.2 Methodology

The method of this research is mainly an art historical study of the artwork of the Belgian artist, Berlinde De Bruyckere. Affect and psychoanalytic theory are used as lenses through which to interpret De Bruyckere’s artwork, as they play a fundamental role in capturing the complex interaction between artwork and the audience. Jacques Lacan’s formation of the Ego, Sigmund Freud’s notion of the uncanny, and Kristeva’s theory of abjection provide a valuable theoretical backdrop to the understanding of the possible emotional reactions of the spectator confronted with the representation of the body fragment. However these notions do not satisfactorily explain how De Bruyckere’s work may heighten the spectator’s sense of bodily presence. Affect theory supports the claim that materiality is not only an important element in the construction of meaning, but it also creates connections between the body of the spectator and the represented body fragments. This connection is enhanced through an aesthetic form that capitalises on the affective process at the seat of the emotions and on the understanding of the ‘world’ through all the senses. Affect, in this context, is understood as a pre-symbolic, unlearned, unconscious and non-linguistic occurrence, which can create a space for art’s content outside language. The multitude of personal and embodied interpretations of an artwork may be seen as contradicting the argument that De Bruyckere’s figures can convey ‘shared’ human issues such as fear, pain and suffering. As will be shown in chapter three, De Bruyckere addresses the human condition through the affect produced by subject matter, form, materials and sculptural processes, capitalising on the spectators’ immediate visceral and emotional engagement, which temporarily precedes the symbolic understanding of the artwork. These empathetic responses form a basic level of response to images and to works of art. In recent years, neuroscience has made considerable progress in revealing the mechanisms behind the inter- personal relations, providing a new, empirically based image of intersubjectivity.³ The ‘mirror neurons system’ in human beings, which explains the biological mechanism behind the unconscious mimetic body behaviour, has influenced the debate

³ Intersubjectivity is a term used psychology, philosophy, anthropology and sociology to describe the sharing of emotions, attention or intentions.

whether is ever possible to share some embodied experiences with other human beings (Freedberg, D and Gallese, V. 2007: 197). The ‘mirror neuron system’ may, therefore, help understand why and how spectators empathise with images depicting the body in pain, as it supports the idea that human beings can empathise with the emotions and sensations, such as pain and suffering of another human being. It is however important to highlight that historical and cultural or contextual factors do not contradict the importance of considering the neural processes that arise in the empathetic understanding of visual works of art.

However, while endorsing the ‘affective turn’ in making sense of artwork beyond psychoanalytical accounts, I favour a combination of both the psychoanalytical and the affective model in order to overcome the limits of both theories; by introducing sense perception into the psychological interpretation, and the concept of repression into the affective one (Marks, L. U. 2013: 146).

The aims, concepts and working methods of a previous generation of western artists employing fragments of the human body will also be addressed and where it is appropriate, their work will be looked at in relation to De Bruyckere’s. The *Zeitgeist*, the contemporary art world, and its interpretative framework will be explored in order to situate Berlinde De Bruyckere’s fragmented figures in a contemporary art context.

The discussion of De Bruyckere’s art work, which deals with subjects, such as the body, pain, violence, fear, emotions and war, is thoroughly interconnected with various disciplines, such as art history, feminism, psychology, phenomenology and cognitive neuroscience, pushing it into the realm of the ‘multi-disciplinary’.

This investigation also highlights the significant influence of a previous generation of feminist artists and art historians to a younger generation of artists concerned with the visual representation of the body. Moreover, drawing on feminist studies that underline the link between gender formation and representation, I discuss the role played by sexual difference to the critical reception of De Bruyckere’s artwork versus her intention as an artist. The ambiguity in the representation and reading of the sexed body in her artwork requires a theoretical approach that welcomes the co-existence of various points of views. Therefore, I focus on the discursive exchange between feminist, queer, and ‘post-feminist’ theories in relation to the visual representation of the body in pieces. Understanding these debates about the body helps to contextualise De Bruyckere’s art and provides a framework for addressing the issue of gender and the re-formulation of subjectivity in her artwork.

According to postmodern debates, the representation of a female or male body can never represent humanity and shared emotions. Postmodernism accentuates discontinuity in human experiences. Emotions and experiences are always relative to one's perspective, which is influenced by personal events, history, social class, gender, culture, and religion. This research examines contemporary debates concerning issues such as the 'un/shareability' of emotions and pain and points to the possibility of overcoming postmodernist limitations by using affect theory and the findings of recent cognitive neurological studies.

Primary sources, such as interviews, the artwork of Berlinde De Bruyckere, and the work of other relevant artists, as well as secondary sources, i.e. critical reviews of her work and the participation in lectures, seminars, symposia and courses at various different institutions, have all contributed to the outcome of this research.

1.3 Contribution to Knowledge

De Bruyckere has gained international recognition since exhibiting in the war museum in Ypres in 2000, and at the 'Italian Pavilion' at the Venice Biennale in 2003. In the last fifteen years, her artwork has been exhibited in several museums and public spaces. In 2013, she represented Belgium at the Venice Biennale. More recently, De Bruyckere's work has been included in several art books⁴ about the representation of the body, however, it has barely been analysed and no sustained and in-depth academic study has been carried out yet. This thesis, therefore, will contribute to redressing the lack of critical writing on Berlinde De Bruyckere. Pain, suffering and trauma have been traditionally professed as being beyond the scope of language and its imagery as not abiding to the codes of representation. My interest here lies in how De Bruyckere's artwork makes us rethink the concept of expressing pain and trauma. I argue that not only it is possible to derive knowledge from visual representations of human suffering but, moreover, that human suffering can also be effectively and powerfully conveyed visually. My assumption is that artwork such as that of De Bruyckere could be a way to enable pain to enter wider shared discourse and conceptualization, offering an alternative to medical terminology for describing one's experience with illness. In fact, psychiatrists and doctors increasingly use images, not only to improve the patients' comprehension and adherence to health instruction, but also to provide their patients with an alternative - visual - vocabulary

⁴ Phaidon Press, (2015). *Body of Art*. London & New York: Phaidon Press Inc, p329. Moszynska, A. (2013). *Sculpture Now*, London: Thames & Hudson, p40.

with which to convey their physical and psychic pain.⁵ Moreover, the tendency to harm other people depends on the perceived closeness between ‘them’ and ‘us’. Artwork highlighting the similarities between bodies will not allow us to imagine the other as distant and different. Politically and ethically suggesting that pain is not an invisible and exclusively interior event, but one that we can recognise when the bodies of others are in pain, will make the absent response more difficult to accept and explain, and thus responsibility will have to be reconsidered. A research project that analyses visual representations of pain, trauma and more generally, the depiction of suffering, and which examines the limitations of those, is a contribution to knowledge in terms of how the outcome can potentially be used to empathetically engage viewers and gain their affect and understanding.

This investigation, therefore, also draws attention to what may prevent us from more deeply understanding our shared suffering. I argue, as psychic and physical pain increasingly becomes a mainstream concern, that this influences artists’ representation of suffering as well. By making the link between the uniqueness of individual experiences and the emotional engagement of the viewer to De Bruyckere’s artwork, I assert that certain experiences can be considered ‘shareable’.

I am well aware of the difficulty in finding a way to ‘theorise’ and represent human emotions in general and suffering in particular, in a way that encompasses both their personal nature and, therefore, uniqueness, as well as the possibility of ‘affectively’ communicating and sharing them with other human beings. So far, there has not been much interest by the humanities in developing the notion of spectatorship, which combines the complementary viewpoints of the ‘cognitive universals’ with the learned cultural specificity of emotions.⁶ This thesis, however, combining both viewpoints, contributes to the understanding of audience engagement with artworks that have reproduced the human body or part of it.

⁵ For example, “simply viewing the body reduces the reported intensity of acute physical pain”. The results of the study ‘Visual Distortion of Body Size Modulates Pain Perception’ demonstrate that pain perception depends on multisensory representations of the body and that visual distortions of body size modulate sensory components of pain. Mancini, F, Longo, MR., Kammers, MPM .and Haggard, P. (2011). Visual Distortion of Body Size Modulates Pain Perception. *Psychological Science*, 22 (3) 325 - 330. Available from <http://discovery.ucl.ac.uk/1056476/> [Accessed June 2012]. See also: Schott, G. D. (2015). Pictures of Pain: Their contribution to the Neuroscience of empathy. *BRAIN: a Journal of Neurology*. 138, 812-820. Houts, P.T. (2006). The role of pictures in improving health communication: A review of research on attention, comprehension, recall, and adherence. *Patient Education and Counselling*, 61(2), 173-190.

⁶ The automatic, affective, pre-symbolic, unconscious responses that form a basic level of responses to images.

1.4 Definitions

To help clarify what follows, it is useful to summarise, however briefly, what is meant by some of the terms used throughout this thesis.

1.4.1 The Body

The pivot point of this thesis is the visual representation of the human body in its fragmented form and so; it may not be a surprise that the first term that needs clarification is ‘the body’. It is important to realise that the way we understand our body determines how we understand the world that surrounds us. Our self-understanding is, in part, influenced by the way the body is represented and constructed in art. However, which signifier are we addressing when we look at a representation of the human body? Are we representing the biological, the natural, the social, the constructed, the virtual or the ‘real’ body? What and, indeed whose, is the ‘real’ body?

The body and its representation in the humanities, has been looked at and analysed from the most disparate perspectives, attesting its significance not only to art and gender studies but also to a broader philosophical, cultural, social, historical, and anthropological work. Medical and genetic discoveries that question the medical model of the human body as a purely mechanical-materialistic organism; technology that disconnects communication from the body; and the dominance of visual media in our cultural experience, which isolates and fragments the body, have all contributed to the emergence of new philosophical, psychological, sociological, and art historical debates about the body in the last thirty years. These debates on the body, its representation and role in society, grew in parallel to the explosion of academic publications and popular interest (Shilling, C. 2003: 1, Mirzoeff, N. 1995: 1).

New publications⁷ in different scholarly fields focusing on the body were produced, whilst

⁷ Body & Society, (1995-), Sage Journals. Peer-reviewed journal characterised by the publication of a wide range of critical approaches to the body.

Scarry, E. (1987), *The Body In Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press. Grosz, E. (1994), *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press. Cartwright, L. (1995), *Screening the Body: Tracing Medicine's Visual Culture*. Minneapolis & London: University of Minnesota Press. Shildrick, M. (1997), *Leaky Bodies and Boundaries: Feminism, Postmodernism and (Bio)Ethics*. London: Routledge. Goodwin J. and Attias, R. (1999), eds. *Splintered Reflections: Images of the Body in Trauma*. New York: Basic Books. Price J. and Shildrick M. (1999), eds. *Feminist Theory and the Body: A Reader*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press. Jones, A. and Stephenson, A. (1999), eds. *Performing the Body/Performing the Text*. London & New York: Routledge. Danto, A. (2001) *The Body/Body Problem: Selected Essays*. Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of Californian Press.

in the mass media, the body and its image continued to take centre stage in many magazines and television programs.⁸

These many and varied approaches to looking at the body have inevitably produced a wide range of concepts and perspectives, supporting different ideas and theories on the body which are not fully coextensive, either notionally or methodologically. I am, therefore, aware that the human body, although it is highly visible, is also a fluid object and can be regarded as something that always has “meaning beyond itself” (Butler, J. 2011: viii).

1.4.2. Pain, Suffering and Trauma

Throughout this investigation, I discuss De Bruyckere’s artwork in relation to pain, suffering and trauma. Pain is a fluid sign and, therefore, cannot be precisely fixed, which in turn can give rise to conflicting interpretations. We interpret pain as an indication that something in our body is not functioning, as it should. In fact, for clinicians, pain is a symptom of disease employed in order to find a possible diagnosis. For the purpose of this enquiry, I distinguish between the terms physical pain, psychic / emotional pain, and trauma.

The term physical pain describes, “an unpleasant sensory and emotional experience associated with actual or potential tissue damage, or described in terms of such damage”, which is often associated with bodily injury.⁹ Of course, the sensory system can itself present problems, causing sensations of physical pain even in the absence of physiological problems. In fact, recent neurological studies have discovered that during both physical and emotional pain, the same brain part is activated, pointing out that my decision to distinguish between emotional and psychic pain may be problematic and may contribute to the perpetuation of the mind / body dichotomy (Eisenberg N. and Lieberman, M. 2004). Nevertheless, for the discussion of De Bruyckere’s artwork, I will still distinguish between these two types of pain, because psychic (mental or emotional) pain is more frequently re-experienced (Chen, Z. 2008:

Shilling, C. (2003) *The Body and Social Theory*, London, New York and New Dehli: Sage Publications. Milllett-Gallant, A. (2010) *The Disabled Body in Contemporary Art*, New York: Palgrave MacMillan. Guillaume, L. (2011) *Deleuze and the Body*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

⁸ Television Programs: CSI, (2000-). Creator, Zuiker, A. Producer, Bruckheimer, J. Universal Studio. Universal City, CA. The Biggest Losers US (2004-), USA, reality TV, creator, Broome D., Production 3Ball Production, Company Eyeworks and Shine America. The TV program template has been sold to 27 countries. The Biggest Losers UK, (2009-), The Biggest Losers Sweden (2005-) and so on. Fat Families, (January 2010 - December 2010), United Kingdom, Reality TV, Sky 1. Super Skinny vs. Super Size, (2008-), United Kingdom, Reality TV, Channel 4. Embarrassing Bodies, (2007-), United Kingdom, Documentary, Reality TV, Channel 4.

to just name a few.

⁹ IASP, Pain Terms. [online] International Association of Studies of Pain. Available from <http://www.iasp-pain.org/Education/Content.aspx?ItemNumber=1698#Pain> [Accessed 12.02.2016].

789) and has often been interpreted as a basic human condition of existence (Wille, R. S. 2011: 23).

Psychic pain is described as an accumulation of different negative emotions, such as: sorrow, anxiety, shame, guilt, fear and so on (Orbach, I. 2003: 191). I propose that among the many definitions of emotional pain, the literary one, based on William Styron's personal experience, is the most suited to my purpose.¹⁰ Styron describes mental pain as "the experience of inner torture, perturbation, and surfeit of negative emotion brought about by an inner estranged and hostile force which destroys the unity of the self and the mind" (ibid: 193).

While pain is understood as an attack on the physical integrity of a particular person, suffering arises from an attack on the person's integrity and can involve the whole person or group. I will, therefore, use the term to describe a more general condition of discomfort as the result of mental, emotional, spiritual or physical pain. Moreover, whereas both physical and psychic pain is experienced, suffering does not necessarily need the presence of physical pain to exist.

The notion of trauma, which derives from the Greek 'traumatizo', and means wound, describes an abrupt physical injury. Trauma is a recurrent theme in my investigation and is used in connection to events that cause extreme changes in one's life, or 'terrible' experiences during times of conflict and war. Initially based on psychoanalysis and clinical work with survivors of traumatic experiences¹¹, the term was combined in the 1990s with poststructuralist and feminist concepts, thus broadening the range of its meaning and promoting it as a key concept in the humanities (Radstone, S. 2007: 10).¹² The psychoanalytic definition of trauma is often associated with an excess of external stimuli, an overwhelming of the psyche by physical and emotional pain, by an event not fully understood whilst it was taking place and, therefore, taking the form of a 'Not-Me' experience of disembodiment (Goodwin, J. and Attias, R. 1999: 227).

¹⁰ Styron has written a concise, but compelling book in which he describes his own depression. Styron W. (1992). *Darkness visible: A memoir of madness*. New York: Vintage.

¹¹ The clinical work that has influenced 'trauma theory' is mostly based in America. Several of these clinical studies deal with the Post-Traumatic-Stress-Disorder (PTSD). The definition of PTSD resulted from the observations of the effects that the survivors of traumatic events, like the Holocaust, sexual abuse and the Vietnam War, experience as results of their victimisation (Radstone, S. 2007: 10-11).

¹² The publication of many books and articles during the 1990s shows the increased interest in 'trauma' within the humanities: Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub's *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History* was published in 1992; Cathy Caruth's edited collection *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* in 1995 and her monograph *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History* in 1996.

1.4.3 Postmodernism

De Bruyckere, by visually conveying human emotions with a particular body, seems to utilise universal elements typical of the modernist period. This study, therefore, also investigates the way in which De Bruyckere, in her art practice, negotiates the problematic relationship between modernism and postmodernism. Can her art practice be positioned in between modernism and postmodernism? This interpretation supports the idea of scholars, such as Jurgen Habermas, who in seeking to re-new the project of modernity, rejects the distinction between modernism and postmodernism and situates postmodernism within a larger modernist framework (Habermas, J. 1985: 12). De Bruyckere's modernist tendencies could also provide a backdrop for theorists such as Nicolas Bourriaud and Andrea Huyssen, who are predicting the end of postmodernity and the beginning of a new wave of modernism.¹³

There is not a single recognised and accepted definition of postmodernity. For the purpose of this investigation, however, I adopt Jean-François Lyotard's interpretation in which postmodernism is seen as challenging the assumptions upholding modernism. Lyotard situated the origin of postmodernism in the awareness that the modernist project had reached its limits, both philosophically and in practice, and he defined it "as an incredulity towards metanarratives" (Lyotard, JF. 1986: xxiv). At the centre of postmodernism, therefore, lies a distrust of the unifying grand narrative of the modernist period and promises of the Enlightenment progression through science. Postmodern scholars distrust claims about truth, ethics or beauty and they always emphasise their construction. Social reality and individual consciousness are always constructed. Identity and subjectivity are unstable and in a constant state of flux.

The emphasis on the differences between modernism and postmodernism with the consequent tendency of positioning them as 'contrasting movements' has attracted several critiques. It has been stressed that modernity was a dynamic and ever-changing process, which renders arduous the distinction between the two periods, pointing rather to a slow evolution from modernism into post-modernism. Other theorists (Habermas, J; Eagleton, T.; Jameson, F. Harvey, D.), even question this distinction and consider postmodernism as a development within a still present modernism.

¹³ Bourriaud, N. (2009). *Altermodern*. Tate Britain. Available from http://dnwilliams.com/altprod/readings/bourriaud_altermodernism.pdf [Accessed 10.09.2016]. Huyssen, A. (2006). Introduction: Modernism after Postmodernity, *New German Critique*, 99, 1-5.

Feminist scholars always had a problematic and contradicting relationship to postmodernism. On one side, some theorists (Butler, J., Hekman, S., Nicholson, L.), completely embraced the postmodern rejection of the modernist legacy, adhering to the postmodern anti-essentialism and refusal of the humanist universals of identity, sex and gender. At the other end of the spectrum, 'Modernist revisionists' (Wittig, M, Lovibond, S., Benhabib, S Prokownik, R.), sought to redefine modernism in a way that fits the needs of a postmodern era, positioning their subject between the Cartesian unified subject and the postmodern 'death of man' (Hekman, S. 1990: 20). Their aim was to create a 'partially' unified subject in order to engage in meaningful communication, which is considered essential for the project of female emancipation (Lovibond, 1994: 71). These contradictions that exist within feminism regarding the post/modernist debate, highlight the difficulty for any activity with political content to dissociate itself from 'humanist universals'.

1.4 Outline

Each chapter, although interlaced and interconnected, highlights an aspect of Berlinde De Bruyckere's artwork. Language can communicate only one idea at a time, so for the sake of clarity and to avoid repetitions, I have decided to divide the chapters thematically.

The Literature Review, chapter two, offers a theoretical and historical review of literature on the body and its visual representation, identifying key theories, sources, issues, and debates around the body that contribute to and facilitate the understanding of Berlinde De Bruyckere's artwork. In order to appreciate the connections between De Bruyckere's sculptures of fragmented bodies and the spectator, it is essential to have knowledge on the formation of subjectivity and the role the body plays in this formation. This chapter, therefore, begins with a discussion of the different theories on the formation of subjectivity. Firstly, I examine the psychoanalytical view (Freud, S., Lacan, J.), and Julia Kristeva's notion of abjection. Subsequently, I discuss Michel Foucault's anti-subjective view of the self and how feminist scholars have utilised this perspective to talk about bodies in terms of sexual differences in order to show how subjectivity is constructed by a combination of disciplinary and regulatory powers. Feminist discourses on sexual difference play an essential role in this investigation, as De Bruyckere utilises both the female and the male body to convey shared existential issues. The chapter ends with an account of the phenomenological approach to subjectivity, as this model underlines the vital role the body plays. The issue of the body fragment interpreted as a

part of a lost whole, or taken as an independent signifying entity that resists wholeness, will also be discussed.

The central aim of chapter three is to show how viewers' reception of the body fragments presented in De Bruyckere's sculptures is particularly related to an embodied form of perception. Focusing on De Bruyckere's sculptures that combine body fragments made of wax with soft materials, I explore the way in which the representation of the body plays on the viewer's knowledge of their own body and their memory of the senses. I devote particular attention to the way in which the 'whole sensorium' influences the reception and interpretation of sculptures of body parts. I highlight the way in which Berlinde De Bruyckere's sculptures, through form, materiality and sculptural techniques, create connections between the body of the spectator and the body represented. Additionally, rather than taking the view that casting is a traditional technique that just reproduces real objects, it can be argued that any way of manipulating material contributes to the construction of meaning.

The fourth chapter situates Berlinde De Bruyckere's sculptures and installations within the wider western contemporary cultural landscape, showing that De Bruyckere's artwork reflects the shifts started in the late 1980s in which artists began utilising the body in its fragmented form not only to convey this human uncertainty and vulnerability, but also to express the fluidity and multiplicity of the self. De Bruyckere's way of presenting her artwork cannot be narrowed down to one single style or category, as she takes advantage of several different approaches to display. Nevertheless, De Bruyckere's arrangement of the different sculptures within the installation, as for examples in *Liggende I, II* and *Actaeon* (2012) is part of the creation of the artwork and enhances the sense of fragmentation to the spectators.

Chapter five, based on psychoanalytic theory, examines the liminal place in which the spectator can be propelled when confronted with De Bruyckere's sculptures. It illustrates how the persistence of the theme of absence within the visible and the juxtaposition of the realistic representation of specific body parts with the abstract character of other parts within the same body intensifies ambiguity. Through this uncertainty, De Bruyckere provides an opening into the human psyche, inviting viewers to pause and ponder. It also describes the sources of contrasting feelings, such as repulsion and fascination that De Bruyckere's representations may produce in spectators. The chapter concludes with an analysis of some of the possible reasons behind the spectators' fascination for the fragmented human body.

Chapter six examines mainly two particular exhibitions of Berlinde De Bruyckere, in order to show how the artist takes advantage of the continuity, repetition and reverence of the

‘religious visual language’, with which to communicate with the spectators.¹⁴ I suggest that the suffering body of Christ, as well as the Saints and Martyrs, are De Bruyckere’s initial visual vocabulary, which she then develops further in her sculptures. Again, I question, whether the suffering of a fellow human being can be communicated, shared and visually represented, as discussed in chapter two and three. I investigate De Bruyckere’s communicative strategy of referencing Christ’s body in order to render human suffering ‘shareable’. I contend that, in De Bruyckere’s artwork, Christian iconography is utilised as a visual language that is understood and shared by many different cultures. Tracing her use of religious imagery, I argue that she alludes to Christ’s suffering in order to highlight the vulnerability and mortality of human beings, as well as to critique the modern system of values.

Chapter seven investigates the role played by sexual difference in the critical reception of De Bruyckere’s artwork, versus her intention as an artist. Her fragmented figures have been described as, ‘sexless and headless’.¹⁵ Her sculptures, however, are not sexless as it is often possible to recognise if the subject represented is male or female.¹⁶ De Bruyckere’s figures could then be read as ‘queer’ bodies, resisting any categorisation by continuously shifting in between the two genders as defined by traditional western thought.

¹⁴ De Bruyckere’s exhibitions discussed in this chapter are: ‘Berlinde De Bruyckere, Luca Giordano: We are all Flesh, (2009)’, and her ‘travelling solo’ museum exhibition: ‘Into One Another. Berlinde De Bruyckere in Dialogue with Cranach and Pasolini’, (March 2011).

¹⁵ “De Bruyckere began making work around ideas of the human figure in the early 1990s, first through its absence, stacking and draping woollen blankets on furniture, symbolising shelter and vulnerability. Then she added bodies made of wax, almost completely covered in wool; imperfect, sexless and headless”. [Available from http://www.saatchigallery.co.uk/artists/berlinde_debruyckere.htm [Accessed 15 November 2013].

“...There is universality in her headless, sexless figures”. Available from <http://www.accaonline.org.au/Assets/3465/1/BerlindeDeBruyckereEducationkit.pdf> [Accessed 3 November 2012].

¹⁶ In this thesis, the term sex refers to the biological binary categories ‘male’ and ‘female’ that occur in many species. Gender instead is the subjective, cultural, psychological and behavioural characteristics associated with one of the sex and therefore, socially constructed.

2 Literature Review

The purpose of this chapter is to offer a theoretical and historical review of literature on the body and its visual representation. Identifying the key theories, sources, and debates surrounding the body will contribute to and facilitate the understanding of Berlinde De Bruyckere's artworks. The issue of the body fragment interpreted as a part of a lost whole or taken as an independent signifying entity that resists wholeness, will be discussed. Moreover, to appreciate the possible connection between her sculptures of fragmented bodies and the spectator, it is essential to have knowledge of the interdependence between the formation of subjectivity, the body, and its visual representation. Today, with the dominance of television, films, advertisements, and the advent of the new media culture and 'virtual life', this interdependence of visual representation and the self is even stronger and more multifaceted. For this reason, a significant section of this chapter will be devoted to investigating this causality. With this in mind, I will start by sketching three models of subjectivity that are of particular relevance to this investigation.

Firstly, the psychoanalytical view, in particular Freud's and Lacan's models will be examined. Kristeva's notion of the subject as an 'open-system', and 'trauma theory' developed in the 1980s and 1990s, will also play a particularly important role in this enquiry. Furthermore, the connection between these theories and suffering, trauma and pain, as well as the ability to represent these emotional states through the fragmented body, will be discussed.¹

Subsequently, I will outline the phenomenological approach to subjectivity, in which embodied experiences play a major role in the formation of identity. The increased attention to the connection between knowledge and the sensory has sparked a renewed interest in phenomenology and embodiment. Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger, Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Jean-Paul Sartre have all sought to define embodiment, however, I will concentrate on Merleau-Ponty's definition of embodiment, as in his book *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945), he emphasises the role of the body in defining human experience.

Following the phenomenological concept of the lived embodiment, the notion of affect as the way of overcoming the limits of poststructuralist approaches in understanding the world and our place in it, will be discussed. The visualisation of trauma and violence has entered 'the everyday', as traumatic events are instantly and globally broadcasted. Recent research has

¹ For a detailed exploration of the visual representation of emotional states, such as suffering and fear, through the fragmented body see chapter four, five and six.

highlighted the important influence of affect, alongside ‘historical and geopolitical mediations’, when traumatic experiences are visualised through artifacts. This investigation will combine psychoanalysis and affect theory to challenge rigid structures of knowledge. I will also argue, that a more synesthetic interpretation of artworks, which encourage spectators to engage on a bodily and emphatic level with art, may contribute to a clearer understanding of the concept of ‘shared human emotions’. In fact, my interpretation of De Bruyckere’s artworks as inhabiting a liminal place in which the specificity of the individual body opens up to sensory experiences shared by many, emphasises similarities between bodies rather than the differences. The possibility of inhabiting a shared space in which emotions can be conveyed through the body echoes the attitude of many psychologists believing in the existence of a set of basic and biologically inherited shared human emotions. However, these theories differ markedly from the postmodern view held in many academic disciplines, that emotions are culturally constructed.²

The chapter will end with a discussion of Foucault’s anti-subjective view of the self in which subjectivity is contingent upon political and cultural requirements. I will discuss feminist philosophers that have utilised a ‘Foucauldian’ perspective to think about bodies in terms of sexual difference in order to show how subjectivity is constructed by a combination of disciplinary and regulatory powers.

An important issue that runs throughout this enquiry, cutting across themes, is the impact and contribution of feminism to the debate on the body and its representation. I will examine the limitations of the psychoanalytical / phenomenological / Foucauldian models of subjectivity, highlighting the contributions of feminist thinkers in this field.

2.1 Fragmentation: ‘The Whole is the False’

For Theodor W. Adorno, the work of art is not fragmented by chance, but is “essentially fragmented”. He fittingly noted that, “the splinter in your eye is the best magnifying glass”, drawing attention to the potential and power of the fragment to magnify and therefore, allow us to see more clearly and more in depth (Adorno, T. 2005: 50). Is there any truth then, in the single fragment? Is it possible to rid the fragment of the burden of its implicit wholeness? What does it mean to imply the logically impossible idea of the fragment without its whole?

² See chapter five and chapter seven.

After World War II, Theodor Adorno wrote, “the whole is the false”, contradicting Hegel’s, “the true is the whole” (Adorno, T. 2005: 50). In opposition to the traditional aesthetic favoured by Plato, Augustine and Hegel, who defined beauty as “completeness”, Adorno insisted on the primacy of fragmentation in opposing wholeness.³ Indeed, for him “the fragment is that part of the totality of the work that opposes totality” (Adorno, T. 2013: 61). The fragment is not just part of a lost whole but becomes an independent signifying entity that resists wholeness. This balance, between fragment and totality, is disrupted in the work of art. As Adorno asserts:

...tension in great works of art would need to be not only resolved within their scope...but also preserved within the same scope. But this means nothing less than that precisely in legitimate works the whole and the parts cannot coincide in the way demanded by an aesthetic idea, by no means confined to classicism (Adorno, T. 2002: 182).⁴

Nevertheless, Adorno still understands the fragment in relation to the whole. This need to relate the fragment to its whole highlights the modernist’s “ambivalence of the condition of fragmentation”, as well as the centrality of this loss of wholeness in creating the necessity of compensation. In Adorno’s view, only art can assume this compensatory function (Grundmann, R. 2010: 374-375).

Fragmentation seems to be characteristic of both the modernist and the post-modernist periods. The philosophers Theodor Adorno and Jean-Francois Lyotard could be taken to represent these different periods. Although they lived during different times and were influenced by different school of thoughts, both shared an interest in the role of fragmentation in understanding ‘reality’ and its representation. What distinguished these two philosophers,

³ Kant in, *Critique of Pure Reason*, highlighted the fact that we observe the world from a specific viewpoint. In his view, the subject cannot attain any absolutely true and unconditioned knowledge, because as soon as we try to separate knowledge from our experience we encounter contradictions, which Kant called ‘antinomies’. The only way to prevent antinomies is to “resist the temptation to fetishize our own ideas by claiming knowledge of the absolute, eternal nature of things” (Hawkes, D. 2003: 75). Hegel saw in this impossibility to obtain absolute knowledge a challenge. In *Phenomenology of Spirit* he stated that the truth is by definition historical and the only way to understand history is in relation to the whole, which he calls *Geist* (Mind or Spirit). For him the identity of everything (people, things, words, events, ideas and so on) is established by the sum of its relations. Identity, therefore, it is not only determined by all its direct relations but also by all “its determinative negations”, by what it is not (Belfour, I. in Tronzo, W. 2009: 83) Hegel with his dictum “the True is the whole” was asserting that to achieve “Absolute Knowing”, which is real wisdom and knowledge in philosophical matters, all the historical and present philosophical theses must always be considered, as each of them may express a fragment of truth (Hawkes, D. 2003: 78-79). Since at the basis of Hegel’s thinking there is the assumption of wholeness, the true meaning of any fragment can only exist in relation to the whole of which it is a broken part. “Philosophical discourse will follow the unfolding of fragmentation toward the wholeness that is necessarily inscribed in the fragment itself” (Desmond, W. 2005: 101)

⁴ Adorno’s discussion of the fragment in his book *Beethoven: The Philosophy of Music* refers to his study of Beethoven’s music. He divides the composer’s music in three periods and argues that the thematic unity found in the first two periods starts to disappear in the third period (Bernstein, J.M. 1994: 304).

however, was the way in which they conceived ‘reality’. In Adorno’s theory of ‘Art and Aesthetic’, the only way reality can be approached is through art. Because society has lost the capacity to judge, art has to take over this responsibility. On the other hand, for Lyotard, justice cannot be obtained, so art’s accountability to the world is to spread the message that justice is impossible to obtain (ibid: 376).

For modernists, such as Adorno, the centre is lost, hidden or even missing and cannot be found. This absence is seen as a loss and, therefore, a negative event. So modernist thinkers and artists interpret fragmentation as a loss and as destruction, and mourn wholeness. Post-modernists such as Lyotard also acknowledge the fragmented state of reality but, instead of mourning its loss, they manifest a different attitude towards the fragment. Indeed, they consider the fragment as an opportunity for plurality, the chance to be freed from the limits and expectations imposed by the whole (ibid: 374).

According to Adorno, a work of art that seeks to represent totality in a fragmented or ‘damaged’ world has to be considered false. As he writes:

In perfect works art would transcend its own concept; the turn to the friable and the fragmentary is in truth an effort to save art by dismantling the claim that artworks are what they cannot be and what they nevertheless must want to be: the fragment contains both those elements (Adorno, 2013: 259).

At this point the question may be raised as to whether the body fragment in an artwork can still be considered a disruptive mode of representation that resists assimilation into the whole, when the world itself is broken into fragments, and very few traces of its original integrity remains. If totality in the work of art is false or untrue can we assume that the fragment is closer or a better representation of the truth?

Adorno does not directly invest the fragment with the status of complete truth, because his aphorism, ‘the whole is the untrue’ does not necessarily mean that the fragment has to represent the truth. However, his statement indirectly does seem to confer truthfulness to it. As Ian Belfour affirms, “the whole is untrue, could be a partial performance of its own truth, a fragmentary statement on the falsity of completeness, by implication, the verity of the fragment” (Balfour, I. in Tronzo, W. 2009: 88).

The discussions in relation to the fragmented body always presuppose the discussions of the representation of the body as whole (Owens, M. Laqueur, T. Mirzoeff, N. Foucault, M). But does the body fragment always imply the existence of the whole body? Is the discussion

of the fragmented body in visual art, without mentioning its wholeness or the implied missing parts, even a possibility?⁵

A defining attribute of the fragment as a concept is the incorporation of both notions: presence and absence. Presence is given by the fragment itself, the tangible object, and its materiality. Absence refers to the missing part, what should be there but seems to be missing. This dichotomy between presence and absence is a defining element in De Bruyckere work. The notion of presence/absence, similarly to binary oppositions such mind/body, male/female, inside/outside, culture/nature and wholeness/fragmentation, have deeply influenced the conception of the body. Scholars in different fields have paid special attention to the binary oppositions that underpin Western thought and have challenged the traditional mind-body dichotomy inherited from Descartes.⁶ These critiques produced a variety of theories that refused to accept the limitations and value system inherent in the mind/body opposition, where the supremacy of the mind was considered as natural or as a given. This privileging of one term over the other has its origins in the mind and body dichotomy of Plato, continued by Augustine, and finally, metaphysically expressed beautifully by Descartes in his “cogito ergo sum” (Descartes, R. in Cottingham, J. 1988: 30).⁷ Only one, who could successfully transcend his/her own body, had the opportunity to become a subject and occupy a position of reason and, in doing so, overcome the unreliable experience of the senses (ibid: 61).⁸

Descartes’ “I think, therefore I am”, however, does not explain how consciousness is influenced by the physicality of a person’s own body. The body and the exploration of our embodied experiences preoccupied Merleau-Ponty throughout his career. He drew attention to the problems created by traditional dichotomies, especially Cartesian dualism, involving the

⁵ It is not the intention of this thesis to discuss issues of disability and physical difference. However, the realisation that the ‘wholeness’ of bodies is a fantasy, a fiction may draw attention to arbitrariness of many subdivisions. In fact, there is no productive distinction to be made between the able or disable body. From a Disability Studies perspective, we must acknowledge that we will all become disabled if we live long enough or in Robert McRuer words, “Sooner or later, if we live long enough, we will all become normate” (McRuer, R 2006: 198).

⁶ Foucault, M., Cixous, H., Butler, J., Derrida, J., Merleau-Ponty, M., to name but a few.

⁷ Rene Descartes wrote *Meditations* (first published 1641). He is called the founding father of modern philosophy. He questioned all his beliefs as much as he could. This method is called Cartesian doubt. Descartes was not completely original in his argument. Avicenna, a Persian philosopher who lived during the Islamic Golden Age (1000), imagined a human being coming into existence in mid flight through a vacuum, not getting any sensation, or sensory contact with his body at all. Suddenly this being, after the free fall, exists. The question the philosopher asked was: would such a person have any experiences at all? Would he be self-conscious? The philosopher thought that he would, even though there was no input. The person would still be conscious of himself and concluded that the idea of the self was independent from the body. Augustus had a non-dissimilar argument to Descartes as well. Descartes, however, is famous for having expressed this idea eloquently, Tate Modern (2012). Week 2: Mind and Body. [lecture notes]. *Mind/Body/Art*. Available from <http://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-modern/courses-and-workshops/mindbodyart> [Attended February - March 2012].

⁸ As Descartes, in his Discourse Four wrote, “we know for certain that it is the soul, which has sensory awareness and not the body. For when the soul is distracted by an ecstasy or deep contemplation, we see that the whole body remains without sensation, even though it has various objects touching it” (Descartes, R. in Cottingham, J. 1988: 61).

mind and the body. The reflections and debates on dualism played a pivotal role in his work, since establishing the body as ‘object’ is essential in the construction of the notion of an objective world, as well as the way in which the world is perceived. According to Merleau-Ponty, as soon as the concept of the body, “the constitution of the object”, is questioned, the notion of an external world completely separated from the “thinking subject”, will be questioned too, revealing in this way “the perceiving subject as the perceived world” (Merleau-Ponty, M. 2012: 72).⁹

Descartes’ division of mind and body has always been problematic for feminist scholars because of its correlation to the opposition between male and female. Both males and females have material bodies, however for many centuries, only women, in part because of their connection to childbearing, were considered unable to transcend the body. The body was considered a negative term and women, by association, represented that negativity. In this way, the mind/body dichotomy has been linked to the split between culture and nature, with women considered more fully embodied than men, more biological and in tune with their body and for this reason, less able to rise above the uncontrollable natural processes and passions, less rational and therefore, disqualified from and incapable of producing knowledge. Flesh and blood and the capacity to reproduce, which are considered natural ‘processes of nurturance’, have been associated with women and by extension, with Mother Nature herself (Robinson, H. 1995: 18). This ‘phallic logic’ does not only initiate the process of subjectivity by introducing the distinction between I and Not-I, but also produces the powerful opposition to the masculine active, conscious spirit and concept of presence against the feminine passive, vegetative, primitive body, and absence (Pollock, G. 2013b: 167).

Many feminist thinkers such Judith Butler, Elizabeth Grosz, Griselda Pollock and Amelia Jones, have criticised the disembodied concept of subjectivity.¹⁰ In their writing they had to tackle corporeality and conceive a philosophical framework with which to make sense of

⁹ Moving beyond dualism, Merleau-Ponty’s embodiment theory denotes a return to ‘existence’ and not interpreting the body as added onto the ‘mental’, but as inseparably linked (Merleau-Ponty, M. 2012: 9). Stating that mind and body are connected is nothing new, since even Descartes noted the complexity of their connection in his sixth *Meditation* (Descartes, R. 2000: 82-83). Therefore, it is important to highlight that the idea of embodiment by Merleau-Ponty, does not just add ‘having the body’ as another variable in the multi-variables-equation that is the human-subject, but suggests that embodiment precedes all other characteristics. As he puts it “we must not, therefore, wonder whether we really perceive a world, we must instead say: the world is what we perceive” (Merleau-Ponty, M. 2012: xvi). For him both, objective thought and Descartes doubting method (intellectualist) are flawed ways to rationalise the world, as the only way to access the world is through human experience.

¹⁰ Poullain de la Barre in 1673 in his work *On sexual equality*, in agreement with Descartes mind/body dichotomy, stated that “the mind has no sex” (Fraisse, G. 1994: 19). Early feminists disavowed the body and endorsed dualism to achieve equality with men. The philosophical justification for this approach is based on the Cartesian mind/body dualism, which supports the idea that while real differences may exist on a biological level, the mind is a non-sexed entity (Meynell, L. 2009: 6). However, once the mind is accepted as sole and privileged site of self-awareness, the body and everything connected to it becomes irrelevant. In this case the ‘equality’ relies on the erasing of the body and sexual differences.

sexual difference in order to defy the binaries intrinsic in language and to illustrate its construction.¹¹ Through their theoretical and aesthetic discussions on the body and its role in society, they have reshaped our ideas of how women and men interpret the body.

2.2 The Fragmented Self

In De Bruyckere's artwork, the human emotional landscape manifests itself on the surface of her fragmented figures' bodies. Psychoanalysis, therefore, is a particularly valuable tool for the discussion of De Bruyckere's artwork, as it provides a model for understanding the psychological connection to the body. As Elizabeth Grosz acknowledges: "the psyche is a projection of the body form" (Grosz, E. 1994: 27). The body holds a significant position in Freud's tripartite structure of the self because every connection and piece of information between ego and the 'outside world' is acquired through the body and the skin. In his view, the surface of the body is where both internal and external perceptions and sensations start (Freud, S. 2001a: 25). Similarly, in Lacan's mirror stage, the image of the body plays a fundamental role (Lacan, J. 2006: 76). Additionally, several psychoanalytical concepts based on Freud's and Lacan's theories are essential to determine the importance of the absence of body parts in the signification process.

Psychoanalysis in general, and Sigmund Freud's theories in particular, have been heavily criticised and branded unscientific and ineffective (Cohen, P. 2007).¹² Although I am aware of

¹¹ The body has always been a matter of concern to feminist thinkers and 'activists'. Indeed the body took centre stage during what is mostly referred to as 'the first-wave' feminism. The social reformer, Josephine Butler recognised the importance and absolute necessity for women, to keep control over their bodies (Heidensohn, F. 1995: 21). The violation of basic women's rights at the hand of male doctors was still widely perpetuated in 1952, as female patients were routinely injected with cancerous cells in the uterus without being asked and notified (Skloot, R. 2011: 179-190). After the First World War women continued to fight for sexual equality and the right to control their own body (Abortion Reform Association), but the body/mind dualism lingered on, as the body was believed to be separate from the self and to be controlled by it. Simone de Beauvoir's work, *The Second Sex*, has been seminal in theorising the link between the body and the self. Her vision is considered the starting point of the sex/gender separation, where sex is seen as fixed and determined by biology, and gender is seen as a social construct, historically and socially changeable (De Beauvoir, S. 1997: 295). However, the new generation of feminists disagreed with Simone de Beauvoir's negative description of the female body (De Beauvoir, S. 1997: 333), sexual initiation and motherhood (ibid: 513), and tended to highlight the positive sites of being a woman, "turning difference into a strength, of affirming positivity" (Braidotti, R. 2013: 187).

The 'second-wave feminism', which lasted from the early 1960s to the late 1980s, focused on inequalities. During this period the personal aspects of women's lives took central stage. The personal became deeply politicised, and became instrumental in revealing the sexist structure of power. "Feminists began to develop a critique of the 'politics of the body' in terms of the material body as a site of political struggle" (Bordo, S. 2003: 16). The work of feminist researchers to recover women's history during the second wave feminism focused unavoidably on the body. Several major works published in the 1970's, such as Sheila Rowbotham's *Hidden from History* (1975) and Germaine Greer's *The Female Eunuch* (1970) just to mention a few of them, highlighted the different roles played by women in society. During that time feminist activists were reassessing the female body and its meaning in a wider context, recognising the importance of the personal experience of women alongside the political and institutional forms (Battista, K. 2013: 13).

¹² The June 2008 issue of *The Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association*, has shown that Freud's theories have been critiqued for being sexist, fraudulent, unscientific and wrong (Cohen, P. 2007).

these critiques, I believe it is important to reflect on Freud's singular contribution to human thought and the sheer originality of his ideas. His work had a tremendous impact on Western culture, shaping the way we understand childhood, personality, memory and sexuality. His theories and terminology have entered popular culture, film and television in the West, becoming part of the everyday language. Furthermore, during the last fifteen years, psychoanalysis' reclaims of scientific status seem to have become a reality, although it still resonates little outside the bounds of psychology education.¹³

I consider psychoanalysis as a dynamic 'set of theories', which are continually re-contextualised, quoted and reviewed by both supporters and detractors. Griselda Pollock, for instance, underlines the importance of placing psychoanalytical practices and the academic field of visual culture, in a "productive relation to each other", and points out the synergy of debating similar questions in different practices (Pollock, G. 2013b: xiiv). To prove her point, she highlights the massive influence played by psychoanalysis as a theoretical framework in the understanding of images and spectatorship from the 1970s onwards. She lists Lacan's mirror stage, the imaginary, the gaze, and feminist psychoanalysis, as playing a significant role in the study of images and spectatorship. Feminist scholars have also widely used psychoanalytical theories in order to look at the workings of the unconscious in terms of pleasure, pain and desire. They utilised psychoanalysis to understand ideology in general and in particular the concept of patriarchy (Mitchell, J. 1987). Psychoanalysis has also been widely used to understand and disrupt the visual pleasure (Mulvey, L. 1975), that was believed to reinforce patriarchal modes of sexual- and racial- differences, (Pollock, G. 2013b: 7; Jones, A. in Mirzoeff, N. 2013: 367). Moreover, theories of fetishism, which were used from the 1970s to 1990s to make sense of differences, still influence the way we interpret images of the body, even though more scholars and artists are moving towards a more intersectional method of

¹³ Of special interest are a series of papers written by Kihlstrom, a cognitive-behavioural authority, in which he progressively 'reaches' psychoanalysis from a pure cognitive-behavioural and empirical ground. Kihlstrom, J.F. Mulvaney, S. Tobias, BA. Tobis, I. (2000). In E. Eich, J.F. Kihlstrom, G.H. Bower, J.P. Forgas & P.M. Niedenthal (Eds.), *Cognition and Emotion*. New York, Counterpoints: Oxford University Press.

The other front where normally people would dismiss the scientific status of psychoanalysis is regarding its psychotherapeutic practice: does psychoanalysis cure people? Thinking of that question, another important paper is De Maat et al., which is a meta-analysis of effectiveness of psychoanalysis. See: De Maat, S. C. Dekker, J. De Jonghe, F. Kraker, R. Leichsenring, F. Abbass, A. Luyten, P. Van, R. (2009). The Effectiveness of Psychoanalysis: A Meta-Analysis. *Harvard Review of Psychiatry*, May-June, 21(3), 107-137.

For a further discussion on the empirical evidence of psychoanalysis see:

Luborsky, L. & Barrett, M. S. (2006). The History and Empirical Status of Key Psychoanalytic Concepts. *Annu. Rev. Clin. Psychol.*, 2, 1-19. Westen, D. (1998). The Scientific Legacy of Sigmund Freud: Toward a Psychodynamically Informed Psychological Science. *Psychological Bulletin*, 124(3), 333-371. Masling, J. (2000). Empirical Evidence and the Health of Psychoanalysis. *Journal of the American Academy of Psychoanalysis*, 28(4), 665-685. Alfonso, C. A. (2012). Evidence Base for the Molecular Underpinnings of Psychodynamic Psychotherapy. *Psychodynamic psychiatry*, 40(3), 533-535.

identification formation.

The way subjectivity is theoretically conceptualised strongly influences the production and understanding of artworks. During the second half of the twentieth century, the scholarly debate on the formation of subjectivity was dominated by two major views. One group, built upon the psychoanalytical work of Freud and Lacan, argued for the possibility of finding out about the structure of subjectivity and the processes influencing its formation. This model implied a subject with assessable and recognisable content. The other group of scholars and philosophers (Foucault, M.), instead, saw subjectivity as a result of the power structures inherent in society, implying that the subject has no knowable content in itself. Subjectivity, therefore, cannot exist outside of the predetermined power relationships. For the purpose of this investigation, both debates on subjectivity's formation are relevant, as they still influence contemporary visual culture. Furthermore, both models of identification highlight the importance of the relationship to the 'other' in the formation of subjectivity, its fragmentary state and the disputed belief in the subject's autonomy and freedom (Mansfield, N. 2000: 51-52, 66).

For Freud, at the core of personality lies a profound alienation. His contribution was central in developing the idea of the de-centered or fragmented subject, as he divided the self into conscious, preconscious and unconscious (Freud, S. 2001c: 71), and into three different mental 'realms': the Id, the Ego, and the Super-Ego.¹⁴ With his tripartite model, Freud undermined the possibility of a subject centered by a single, fully self-conscious, self-defining identity and Ego (ibid: 72).

¹⁴ The Id, "is the dark inaccessible part of our personality" (Freud, S. 2001c: 73), aimed at gaining pleasure and avoiding pain, (ibid: 74). Freud calls the Id, a "cauldron of seeding excitation", and believes that this bundle of instincts is, and always will be, dominant because it exists as the unconscious part of our personality (ibid: 73).

The second part of the personality, the Ego, is the voice of reason. In Freud's theory the Ego is the "perceptual –conscious part" (ibid: 75), it is the voice of common sense that tries to restrain both the Id and the Super-Ego from their irrational threat of domination (ibid: 76-77). The Ego has three masters, the Id, the Super Ego and the real world (ibid: 77). The Ego is the negotiator and has to mediate between the wild wishes of the Id and the restraints imposed by the Super-Ego and 'reality'. If the Id is guided by the pleasure principle, then the Ego follows the reality principle, as it is in contact with the external world. The Ego, therefore, is formed out of the need to create a protection layer against the outside world. The Ego is weak, ineffective and incapable of containing the demands of the other two parts of the personality: the Super-Ego and the Id (ibid: 73-77).

The Super-Ego represents an internalising of the learned values and morals of society or, as Freud writes, "the father regarded as a model", and the acceptance of what is considered to be right and wrong (ibid: 80). The Super-Ego has two distinct parts: the Conscious and the Ego Ideal. The Ego Ideal is the state of internalised perfection that children believe they need to reach (ibid: 65). The Super-Ego punishes with guilt, but can also reward with gratification, if you strive to attain unreachable expectations (ibid: 61). In this respect, the Super-Ego often opposes the pleasure principle of the Id and the reality principle of the Ego with the morality principle (ibid: 61-65). A well-developed Super-Ego will support the Ego in the repression of forbidden thoughts or actions that might be deemed wrong or threatening. These banned impulses are repressed from the conscious mind into the unconscious mind. The unconscious material however, does not always remain hidden but can re-emerge in dreams, neurotic symptoms, or "slips of tongue" (Cornea C. 2007: 53). It is important to note that, at the core of Freud's model of subjectivity there is a self-sustaining individual that, although decentred, can still be separated from the other subjects (Mansfield, N. 2000: 36).

The French psychoanalyst, Jacques Lacan, emphasised the important role language plays in the formation of subjectivity. Re-interpreting Freud's theory of subjectivity, and continuing Freud's critique on the centered, autonomous, unitary and stable Ego, Lacan showed how body fragmentation is set in motion through the Mirror stage, a key stage in the child's development of subjectivity.

Lacan's mirror stage is particularly useful in the interpretation of De Bruyckere's fragmented figures as it brings to the fore the tension between the fragmented and vulnerable 'lived' body, and the wholeness of the body reflected by the mirror. Through the mirror stage and 'the Imaginary', Lacan highlights the importance of the visual fields in the formation of subjectivity, pointing to the fact that the image of the self always originates from the outside.¹⁵

The mirror stage is a process in the psychological development of the child, where the relationship between the inner and outer world of the child is established. Lacan describes how during this stage, the child acquires his/her bodily awareness, which is essentially experienced as fragmented (Ibid 78). The human child goes through a process in which an external image of the body, his image reflected in the mirror, produces the mental representation of the 'I'. The recognition of the image of the 'I' in the mirror, comes at a time when the infant still lacks motor coordination. The reflected image appears as more coherent, whole and perfect entity instead of the uncontrolled and fragmented movements and undefined boundaries between self and others (Lacan, J. 2006: 78). Faced with the imaginary unity in the mirror image, or the body in pieces, the child rejects fragmentation and identifies with its mirror image, what Lacan calls the 'ideal I', which seems stable, perfect, unified and in control of its parts. Lacan develops the notion that, the child succeeds in overcoming the first experience of bodily fragmentation only when seeing his/her integral self in the mirror. During the formation of the Ego, in order to avoid anxiety about fragmentation, a myth of wholeness is created, counteracting "images of castration, emasculation, mutilation, dismemberment, dislocation, evisceration, devouring, and bursting open of the body" (Lacan, J. 2006: 85). Subjectivity is then defined by a system outside his control, in which the child takes on the image of the "Other" and identifies with it (Lacan, J. 2006: 78). This identification with the mirror and the

¹⁵ Lacan elaborates three fundamental 'orders': The Real, the Imaginary and the Symbolic. The Real, which is not synonymous with 'the truth', or reality, is positioned outside language, beyond symbolisation. The Real is the pre-conscious, the pre-thought, the basis of what will become experience categories once it becomes symbolically appropriated (Evans, D. 2006: 162-163). The notion of The Real continuously changed during Lacan's career, however, after 1964 he describes the Real as "beyond both the symbolic and the imaginary and acting as limit to both ...and is associated with the concept of trauma" (Homer, S. 2003: 83). Lacan calls what we perceive as our real world, the Symbolic, because our reality is made of symbols and the process of making meaning (ibid: 81). The Imaginary order originates with the mirror stage in the process of identity formation.

anticipation of mastery allows the child to perceive him/herself as a complete or whole being. At the same time, however, the image in the mirror is alienating because it becomes confused with the self and takes its place. As the subject sees him/herself in the mirror, s/he realises that both his/her identity and image of the body originates in the external world, so that unified self is obtained at the cost of this self being an-other: the mirror image (Lacan, J. 2006: 78). The function of the Ego is then misrecognition. It is the rejection of bodily fragmentation and alienation. This misrecognition and illusion of completeness causes misery as the psyche projects the image of the perfect body and creates a standard that the fragmented body has to live up to (Lacan, J. 2006: 85). In Lacan's model, the Ego is formed through the image and is based on an illusionary image of wholeness and on the assumption of the inner emptiness of the subject; 'a lack' that can be only replaced by something that originates outside and is, therefore, constructed in a process that is alienating for the subject (Homer, S. 2005: 26).

Lacan's mirror stage will also play an essential role in the discussion of De Bruyckere's incorporation of soft materials in her work, such as pillows and blankets, as potentially functioning as a substitute for the initial fused state with the mother. Indeed, the representation of the body as fragmented and vulnerable will be a constant reminder of the child's renunciation of the initial perfect unity with the mother and the subsequent quest to 're-join' this wholeness.

In De Bruyckere's fragmented figures, the Lacanian relationship between the 'real' and the 'symbolic' plays a particularly important role due to its connection to the 'body-image'. Indeed, the presence/absence dyad already plays a significant role in the infants' life, when they realise that a particular word or sound can successfully influence the caregiver, in turn affecting the presence or absence of 'things' and/or actions that have an effect on their wellbeing. For the infant, the mother is the first symbol of presence and absence and the 'first agent of the child's frustration', as it is the mother who controls the presence and absence of the breast (Lacan, J. 1956-1957: 33).¹⁶ The mother's breast as part object, therefore, is the first 'object petit a'. This is because before the mirror stage, the breast takes up the role of the whole mother in the eyes of the child (Lacan, J. 2004: 168). The 'object petit a' is a term introduced by Lacan to conceptualise the loss of wholeness which produces desire. It emerges as the child separates from objects, such as the mother as 'Other', the breast, the voice, that he/she previously experienced as part of itself. These part-objects representing the 'object petit

¹⁶ My own translation.

a', are seen as objects that could have provided unity to the fragmented subject, but instead are forever lost. This 'object petit a', because it is both separated and included in the child's body, becomes the "presence of a hollow", (ibid: 180). Being the 'index of a void', the 'object petit a' is both presence and an absence, which can never be reached, thus causing desire (Moncayo, R. 2008: 10).

For Lacan, needs are essentially demands for love. The perception of such love reflects a yearning for an impossible state of wholeness and unity with the mother, whom the subject imagines existed in the pre-Symbolic Real. Needs become desires, as soon as the child's demands become detached from his/her natural needs and become demands for love. Hence, this demand for love becomes infinite and will always involve a margin of dissatisfaction. The subject will never be sure that any object is a definite sign of love, as every object in the symbolic order can stand for something other than itself. For this reason, the demand, according to Lacan, will never be satisfied (Lewis, M. 2008: 33-34). In this reciprocal repercussion of absence and presence in the symbolic order, absence can then be said to have just as much of a positive and influential existence in the symbolic as presence has. This is what permits Lacan to state that 'the nothing' is in itself an object (ibid: 183).

2.3 The Feminist Perspective

Psychoanalysis has been heavily critiqued by feminists scholars for its inadequacy in theorising the feminine and the failure to explain female subjectivity, as both psychological models of subjectivity are based on the development of the boy child.¹⁷ The French feminist writer Luce Irigaray, for instance, highlights how the dominance of the phallogentric psychological model of Freud and Lacan marks female sexuality as inherently lacking (Irigaray, L. 1985: 23).¹⁸ This "nothing to see" approach, acquires even more significance in the highly visual Western society where the male sex is interpreted as a symbol of unity, purpose and strength (ibid 24-26). Irigaray proposes a 'female imaginary' that, similar to the 'masculine imaginary', imitates the meaning of the 'sex'. In this case women could be read as plural and fluid (ibid 28). For Irigaray, this difference in male and female sexuality, points to the fact that, "woman's desire would not be expected to speak the same language as man's"

¹⁷ Judith Butler, Jacqueline Rose, Juliet Mitchell, Elizabeth Grosz, Rosi Braidotti, Teresa DeLaurentis, Jane Gallop, Nancy Chodorow, Helene Cixous, Lucy Irigaray to just name a few

¹⁸ See Lacan Seminar IV, XI

(ibid 25). She, therefore, questions male-centered structures of language and underline the importance of finding a feminine specific language to counter the Western phallogentric culture (Running-Johnson, C. 1999: 248)

Kristeva, to counter the male dominated structure intrinsic in Lacan's symbolic order, instead chooses the concept of 'abjection', by forming a theory of subjectivity where the subject remains incomplete, open and disjointed.¹⁹

She combines semiology, representation and psychoanalysis to posit an interconnection between the body, subjectivity, textuality, and showing how the abjection of the maternal body is the necessary precondition leading to the "narcissism of the Mirror stage" (Wright, E. 1998: 194; Tyler, I. 2009: 80-81). Abjection can then be read as an effort to counterbalance the dominance of Lacan's psychoanalytical theories during the second half of the twentieth century, highlighting the role of the mother in the formation of subjectivity.

The notion of abjection, with its recognition that subjectivity is a 'dynamic' process and it is always incomplete and fragmentary, will play a pivotal role in this investigation. Abjection will also be essential in the understanding of ambivalent and contrasting feelings experienced by spectators when confronted with De Bruyckere's fragmented figures. Recognising the possible sources of these contrasting feelings may help us comprehend why De Bruyckere's sculptures of body fragments may cause both fascination and feelings of repulsion and disgust. Furthermore, abjection gives an insight into the role these affects may play in the constitution of our very subjectivities. In Kristeva's theory, the maternal body, in tune with Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalytical models, occupies a central position, as abjection originates in the separation from the mother when the child establishes him/herself as an individual subject. In her theory, the mother and child initially form a continuous body. During the separation and formation of boundaries between mother and child, an intermediate zone of resistance remains, that does not belong to either of them. This un-allocated content troubles the subject's sense of identity and is the site of abjection. Abjection is the reassertion of this forgotten and repressed time, when the struggle to establish individuality meant giving up the safety of an all-encompassing relationship with the primary care giver. Abjection, therefore, is always a reminder of this primary secret and violent refusal of the maternal body, and will always be a re-enactment of this primary separation. The abject is something that sickens us, inducing strong bodily reactions. These responses, even if caused by different objects, are

¹⁹ Although Julia Kristeva is known for being ambivalent towards feminism, her theories have been widely used by feminists to explain and re-define women's role in society.

activated when the perceived boundaries between the world and us, or between others and us are endangered (Kristeva, J. 1982: 7).

The ‘unconscious content’, according to Kristeva, is not ‘safely’ repressed and stored away, but drifts at the edge of the subject’s self-definition, making the distinction between object and subject impossible. Ultimately, subjectivity will never form and the subject will never feel ordered and knowledgeable, as the safe boundary between unconscious and conscious is always incomplete (ibid 7). This process of establishing the boundaries between inside and outside, (the integrity of the body), is itself a bodily process, and with that in mind, Kristeva is drawing attention to the instability and fragility of the boundaries that constitute the single person. For her, the rejection of the ‘by-products’ of the body, like vomit, urine, tears and blood, is a desperate attempt to reinforce subjectivity (ibid 3). Abjection then, is the anxiety and rejection we have towards everything that crosses those boundaries, causing us to question the process of separation and creating uncertainty. However, there is more at stake than the loss of “the clean and proper body”, as abjection is the destabilisation of all systems of meaning, order and truth. What causes abjection is everything that “disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, and rules? The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite” (ibid 4). For this reason, Kristeva’s subject may never be able to fully exist in the semiotic order, as s/he fluctuates between the pre-Oedipal and Oedipal stages.

In the 1990s, a wide range of literature emerged which focused on the abject, especially on the maternal as a site of disgust, as a powerful tool for analysing art, cinema and popular culture, and in order to point out the misogynistic representation of women.²⁰ Imogen Tyler, sees in this re-introduction of the maternal through the abject, a possible reason for the interest raised by abjection as a concept in feminist theory (Tyler, I. 2009: 80-81). Many feminist writers such as Mary Russo, Barbara Creed, and Imogen Taylor acknowledge and support the transformative and subversive potential of abjection as a tool with which to challenge and change social relations (ibid 84). Creed, for instance, recognises the importance of theories based on abjection, as they provide the opportunity to analyse the prevalent fears and fantasies contained and perpetuated in “our cultural imaginary” (Creed, B. 2003: 166).

However, abjection has been condemned for perpetuating the concept rather than challenging the perceived abject standing of women. Critics of Kristeva’s writings, claim that

²⁰ Creed, B. (2003). *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism and Psychoanalysis*, London & New York: Routledge.
Fletcher, J. and Benjamin, A. (1990). *Abjection, Melancholia and Love: The Work of Julia Kristeva*, London & New York: Routledge.

her theory of subjectivity formation does little to challenge patriarchal psychoanalytic paradigms and it has been denounced, as lacking connections to women (Walker, M. 2002: 125). Several feminists (Wittig, M., Butler, J.) have criticised the focus on the maternal for excluding those women who are not childbearing. They have also highlighted a series of problems in adopting the matricidal logic of Kristeva's notion of abjection as 'a feminist theory', in which the maternal takes up the position of a subject that cannot speak (Tyler, I. 2009: 86). These scholars tend to privilege a reading of abjection that includes social and political components as well, also because abjection influences the creation of both the individual and the social body through the exclusion of particular subjects (ibid 79). Moreover, positioning the mother as the primary focus of abjection is not only fiction but has real repercussion on the lived body and may even encourage violent disgust towards the maternal body (ibid 95). As Donna Haraway observes, this theory is never far away from the lived body and, therefore, the matricide in Kristeva's abjection risks making women believe their own abjection (Haraway, D. 1992: 299; Butler, J. 1993: 190).²¹

2.4 Un/Shareable Human Emotions

Artworks recalling traumatic experiences, as in many of Berlinde De Bruyckere sculptures, often go beyond the memory of the event itself and offer the audience the opportunity to form a connection between personal and 'collective' experiences, creating a space in which the traumatic events may be 'shared'.²² Both artists and spectators, even if they have not witnessed the traumatic events themselves, could be said to have the capacity to experience "secondary or vicarious trauma", pointing to a possible empathic reaction to the pain of others

²¹ For Judith Butler, the pre-discursive maternal body is a cultural construct and should also be interpreted in this way, (Butler, J. 2007: 123, 127). In addition, in her critique of Kristeva's account of the maternal body, she equates abjection to exclusion. Butler's 'abjection', loses the link to bodily responses and becomes the result of social norms, which pushes the subject to conform to the dominant ideal, reinforcing the power of certain groups, (white men/heterosexuals). Anybody not conforming to the dominant ideal is excluded, (Butler, J. 2007: 115-117). Krauss also points out that abjection is not exclusively a psychic process, but that it can be interpreted as a process of exclusion within a modern state too, (Krauss, R. 1997: 236). Indeed, Kristeva's concept of abjection has been widely used to establish 'social and racial' categories of abject bodies, (Ahmed 2000), as well as to make sense of disabled bodies.

²² There are many recent collections and books dealing with trauma and memory from various perspectives. For some recent important examples: Caruth, C. (1995). *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press. Leys, R. (2000). *Trauma: A Genealogy*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Antonius C. G. M., Robben and Suárez-Orozco, M. (2000). *Cultures under Siege: Collective Violence and Trauma*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Bal, M. Crewe, J., and Spitzer, L. (1999). *Acts of Memory: Cultural Recall in the Present*. Hanover, NH: University Press of New England. Rogers, K. Leydesdorff, S. Dawson G. (1999). *Trauma and Life Stories: International Perspectives*. New York: Routledge. Alexander, J. C. Eyerman, R. Giesen, B. Smelser, N. J. and Sztopka, P. (2004). *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity*. Berkeley: University of California Press. Guerin, F. and Hallas, R. (2007). *The Image and the Witness: Trauma, Memory and Visual Culture*. London: Wallflower Press.

(Kaplan, A. 2005: 39-40). Moreover, even exclusively internal excitations can become sources of trauma (Adkins, B. 2007: 172).

Already Freud emphasised the connection between the body, pain, suffering and trauma, stating that, although we keep striving for happiness, this happiness is elusive and not very easy to attain. At the beginning of *Civilisation and its Discontents* he asserts that the purpose of life is to maximise pleasure and minimise pain (Freud, S. 2010: 27; 31-32). The problem, however, is that we can only experience happiness in contrast to unhappiness. Yet unhappiness is far more often experienced, often plunging us into a state of distress and dissatisfaction. Human beings, for Freud, are threatened with unhappiness, pain and suffering from three directions. Firstly, from our own body, due to the physical decay and mortality that we experience as we grow old. Secondly, human beings are constantly in danger from nature, accidents, chance and the external world. And, finally, in a passage at the beginning of the book, he states that, the worst of all suffering, worse than physical decay, worse than the way fate treats us, is our everyday interaction with other people. This type of suffering is the most awful, as it is loaded with pain. Not only do others hurt us but we, as irrational beings, are also inclined to hurt others (Freud, S. 2010. 28).

As recent history and current events illustrate, so far the human race has not succeeded in eliminating irrationality and the propensity to hurt others. Many hopes of a peaceful twenty-first century were shattered by the terrorists' attack on 11th September 2001, in New York, and the wars that followed thereafter.²³ In the West, themes such as war, trauma, and oppression, gained additional importance after 9/11, also drawing attention to the important role played by trauma in the formation of ethnic and national identity. Artists and curators reacted strongly to the violence and wars.²⁴ Moreover, after 9/11 and the war in Iraq, there has been an increased scholarly interest in understanding the communication and representation of traumatic events in order to explore the link between viewer and trauma-related art (Bennett, J. 2005: 2). De Bruyckere does not refer to specific acts of violence or wars in her artwork, however she addresses an audience that is aware of and accustomed to the representation of

²³ Artists and curators responded strongly to the September 11 and its aftermath. The list of group exhibitions and memorials dedicated to the tragic event is very long. These are few examples: DUST TO DNA by Kevin Clarke (1953-), Ground Zero an exhibition of post 9/11 art, features the work of over 50 artists. Place in the Sky by Flo Fox (1945-), New York September 11 by Magnum photographers, Touhami Ennadre (1953-), "Missing" by Martha Cooper (1940-), World Trade Center by Steven Lampasona (1956-). For a more detailed list of artists responses to the terrorist attack see: Art Now: Responses to 9/11: Visual Art. Available at <http://ncac.org/resource/art-now-responses-to-911-visual-art> [Accessed 05. 12.2016]. Moreover, on the 15th anniversary of the attacks, for instance, the 9/11 Memorial Museum hosted a major exhibition of art inspired by events that day, ranging from paintings to sculpture and video.

²⁴ In 2007 for instance the Iraq War was the central theme of Okwui Enwezor's Seville Biennale and Robert Storr's Venice Biennale (Farquharson, A. 2007).

these brutal events in the media. The increase of imagery of suffering people in the mass media can be interpreted in different ways. On one side, this suffering may induce empathy in the viewers and persuade them of the futility of violence. On the other side, by parading the suffering of the other, the nation 'at war' can reassure the viewers of its strength and that it is still powerful and able to defend its citizens.

The representation of the fragmented body plays a fundamental role in drawing attention to the traumatised and suffering other. In fact, sculptures of body parts are often labelled 'trauma art'. 'Trauma related art', as a thematic category, emerged in the 1990s in tandem with the explosion of interest in traumatic events and its theorisation during that time in the humanities (Radstone, S. 2007: 11). Deanna Petherbridge, for instance, stated that for some artists the fragmented body becomes "a metaphor for social alienation and psychic loss" (Petherbridge, D. 1997: 69). For Nancy Spector too, artists during the 1990s drew attention to the tormented state of the body in contemporary society.

This is an age, where emotional battles triggered by the disintegration of boundaries dividing public and private spheres are played out. In what has been designated as our contemporary wound culture ... the body absorbs the traumas of ever-shifting social realities, bearing its scars as visible signs (Spector, N. 1998: 89).

Jill Bennett, who considers "art a kind of visual language of trauma and experiences of conflict and loss", investigates the role played by contemporary art in conveying these experiences and emotions, (Bennett, J. 2005: 2). Drawing particularly from the writing of Gilles Deleuze and Foucault, but also from literary trauma studies, she explores the link between the viewer and trauma-related art.²⁵ Art, she argues, can be considered as "an embodiment of sensation" with the ability to generate empathic responses and maybe prompt the viewer to ponder on the causes of violence and suffering (ibid 8). Interestingly, she contends that the visual representation of trauma may not follow the "logic of representation", as traumatic events have traditionally been situated outside of language and representation (ibid 3). In a situation of trauma communication through spoken language fails and the body may take on the role of communicator (Sliwiski, S. in Pollock, G. 2013: 124).

The debates on the im/possibility of visually representing traumatic events, pain and suffering are of great importance in contemporary culture. Trauma theory suggests that

²⁵ See Deleuze's book *Proust and Signs*, in which he introduced the term "encountered sign", where the sign is understood through affect or emotion instead of reasoning (Bennet, J. 2005: 7).

representation is inadequate in communicating these extreme events, “since the representation of trauma falls outside of our cognitive and representational systems” (Pollock, G. 2013b: 14).

The issue of whether suffering can be communicated has been the focus of the eighteenth century debate on pathos, or ‘pathos formula’, between Gotthold Ephraim Lessing and Johann Winckelmann.²⁶ Although Lessing agreed with Winckelmann, that in the Laocoön group the representation of pain through Laocoön’s scream did not equal the ‘roar’ described by Virgil in the Aeneid, he nevertheless, challenged Winckelmann’s interpretation of the scream’s absence as a stoical refusal of the ancient Greeks to depict suffering (Mattick, P. 2003: 53-58).²⁷ For Lessing, the depiction of pain on Laocoön’s face would have deformed it, going against what he believed was the purpose of visual art: to represent beautiful bodies.

Comparing poetry with the plastic arts, he argued that poetry can tell a story through narrative, whereas visual art, being static, has to introduce a ‘transitional moment’ in order to prompt the viewer to imagine the story (Murray, C. 2003: 151; Spivey, N. 2001).

Elaine Scarry accurately articulates the conceptual difficulties associated with the representation and understanding of physical trauma, recording its ‘unshareability’ and the fact that pain not only resists objectification and therefore, language but it also “actively destroys it” (Scarry, E. 1987: 4). Pain, she argues, is a private and lonely experience, which isolates and silences the sufferers, depriving them of the ability to communicate and therefore, catapulting them back into a pre-language state (Scarry, E. 1987: 4). Thus, according to this standpoint, “to have pain is to have certainty” and knowledge; “to hear about pain is to have doubt”, pointing to the impossibility of describing or representing somebody else’s pain (Scarry, E. 1987: 13). Accepting this perspective could be very restrictive and disabling for visual artists who intend to convey the suffering and traumas of victims of violence and wars.

The ‘unshareable’ nature of pain and trauma has been criticised by many scholars. Mark Sullivan, for instance, locates pain between mind and body as pain is intrinsically social and acquires its meaning from an interpersonal perspective (Sullivan, M. 2001: 146). Even if we agree that we don’t really know what others feel, we seem able to convey it to others. Moreover, the fact that pain communicates through metaphors does not necessarily imply its

²⁶ Pathos is a Greek word that signifies a strong and overwhelming feeling or passion. The German art historian Aby Warburg (1866-1929) was particularly interested in the way Renaissance artists adopted classical visual conventions to convey human emotions and passions. At the beginning of the twentieth century he developed the concept of pathos or pathos formula, where he traced the similarities in the representation of strong emotions, such as fear, confusion, desire and anger, between the various historical periods (Spivey, N. 2001: 118-119).

²⁷ The Laocoön group was created around 200 BC and was inspired by the writing of Homer and Virgil recounting the Trojan War. Laocoön, who predicted the fall of the city of Troja, was subjected to the rage of Apollo, who sent two giant snakes to kill him and his two sons (Murray, C. 2003: 151).

complete ‘unshareability’. We may agree that every experience is personal and cannot be completely shared, however, nothing stops us to trying to communicate it to somebody else. Veena Das also considers Scarry’s standpoint on pain problematic as it excludes from language incomprehensible words and ‘groans’ that could contribute to the communication of pain. Rather than continuously emphasising the unshareability of pain, she regards the issue of the recognition and acknowledgment of the ‘pain of others’ as a more significant matter (Das, V. 1996: 70).

Scarry’s argument, however, does not simply dismiss representation as a tool to externalise trauma and suffering. In fact, with the help of the word ‘work’, which she considers ‘near synonymous’ with both ‘pain and created object’, she connects pain and imagination (Scarry, E. 1987: 169) repositioning in this way pain from within the body to the external and tangible world. Pain and imagination then “begin to move from being a self-contained loop within the body to becoming the equivalent loop projected into the external world” (Scarry, E. 1987: 170). She positions traumatic pain and ‘imagination’ on the opposite sides of the same axis along which all other “perceptual, somatic and emotional events” can be mapped (ibid 65). Imagination, filled with objects, is located at the opposite extreme of physical pain, which is defined by “a complete absence of referential content”, a lack in locating a corresponding object in the outside world (Scarry, E. 1987: 162). Imagining, she argues, offers the opportunity to create ‘objects’ when they are not available (ibid 167), establishing a counterpart between state (cold-hunger) and imagined object (blanket-food). The concept of ‘work’ makes private events, bodily pain and imagination, sharable. Bodily pain and suffering move past the limitations of their privacy and “begin to be shareable, that sentience becomes social and thus acquires its distinctly human form” (ibid: 170). Although the artifact represents just a fragment of the imagined world, being real and visible means it can be shared and thus provides, even in its imperfect form, a possible way to externalise trauma (ibid: 171). This visual outward expression may then be seen as a bridging of the divide between private trauma and the attempt of the ‘others’ to understand it.

Susan Sontag, too, highlights the important difference between having pain or being in a conflict situation and being made aware of it through images. In her most recent book, *Regarding the Pain of Others*, she examines the role of photography in depicting, conveying, trivialising, and re-inflicting the ‘pain of the other’. This very important difference between images and reality does not, however, preclude our ability to see the pain of others, thus making the photograph an important tool for conveying suffering (Sontag, S. 2004: 3-15). “By

being photographed”, the event becomes real “to those who are elsewhere, following it as “news”” (ibid: 19). Sontag draws attention to the moral and ethical aspects of the photographic or mediated image. Acknowledging the ubiquity and overload of images in the media, she encourages the reader to pay attention to the lasting power of images depicting the suffering of others. “Let the atrocious images haunt us,” she writes. “Even if they are only tokens, and cannot possibly encompass most of the reality to which they refer, they still perform a vital function” (ibid: 102).

Ann Kaplan and Bang Wang echo Scarry’s view that the step from the individual imagination to social imaginary is essential for overcoming traumatic events and dealing with sources of trauma and violence. For them, the most important question is if it is better to accept the actual “inadequate telling” of traumatic events in the hope it will make people aware of these traumas and maybe prompt changes rather than force trauma “to a mystified silence” (Kaplan, A. and Wang, B. 2003: 12). For them, not only does the visual or written representation of trauma function as collective memory, as a channel through which traumatic events can be transmitted to the next generation and maybe shared, but also creates “its own reality” (ibid: 14).²⁸

2.5 The Embodied Self: Rethinking Subjectivity

What art objects are and what happen when spectator come in contact with them has been a concern for Western art historians for centuries. Art critics and cultural theorists have increasingly adopted the notion of affect to capture the complex interaction between the artwork and the audience.²⁹ Affect, which places emphasis on bodily interaction between artwork and viewer, acknowledges and creates a space for the content of art outside discourse and ‘language’. Seen as an interdisciplinary endeavour, more and more scholars point to affect as the way forward with which to overcome the limitations of poststructuralist approaches to understanding the world and our place in it. Although, for Clare Hemmings, scholars of affect exaggerate the problems of poststructuralism in order to advance the affective agenda

²⁸ Collective trauma, however, creates also discourses of suffering that bring with it a categorisation and classification between different types of trauma or between different nations/ethnic groups influencing in this way the power relations between victims and ‘viewers’ (e.g. in the form of local and international help organisations). For Erica James, after the Cold War the classification of suffering is needed to validate ‘transnational’ interventions, which she considers a continuation of colonial expansion. In her view transnational governmental and non-government help organisations are “reminiscent of what Foucault calls bio-power”. As she points out, in the post cold war era bio-power is supported and legitimated by discourses of trauma (James, E. 2004: 130).

²⁹ Brain Massumi, Eve Sedgwick Kosofsky, Simon O’ Sullivan, Lauren Berlant to name but a few.

(Hemmings, C. 2005: 549, 556), I think that placing our embodied experiences at the centre of subjectivity formation provides a valid way of ‘thinking through the body’ and sensing artworks. Artwork, such as De Bruyckere’s fragmented bodies, which rely on the spectators’ bodily involvement in order to convey the suffering of a fellow human being, points to what we share as human beings rather than what distinguishes us. On the other hand, it is important to recognise that the cultural and social environment plays an important part in shaping the body and the development of the sensory formation. Different cultures may have different standards regulating, limiting and defining various categories of social acceptability. I will, therefore, try to connect various theoretical viewpoints to allow the coexistence of unlearned ‘universal’ and cultural situated-ness. My aim will be to posit some limited shared or collective human bodily experiences, and at the same time recognise that knowledge is also contingent with historical, social and cultural experiences.

In the 1980s, the debate on the body shifted focus from the question of what the body is or what we think about it, towards questioning how we think through the body. This shift reignited the interest in methodologies based on phenomenology, which highlights how cognition is itself embodied. The renewed interest in the representation of the body in Western art, as well as the interest in phenomenology, has been influenced by the sense of reversibility, as Merleau-Ponty puts it, of “being in the world” as being enfolded in the flesh of the world, (Beugnet, M. 2013: 192).

Merleau-Ponty’s existentialist embodiment theory, based on perceptual experiences, has been fundamental in revealing that the body should not be considered exclusively for its materiality. Key to his theory is the notion of the embodied subject and the subject’s relation to the world. As discussed above, Lacan theorises human beings as sensing themselves from within their own body and, therefore, interpreting their own body as fragmented. Subjects see themselves as whole only when they see their image reflected in the mirror, making the outside object (mirror) essential for the formation of identity. Merleau-Ponty, instead, sees the human body as a medium for the perception of the world, as well as an expressive space that adds to the meaning of personal actions. He does not consider the body as an object divided from its subjectivity. Instead, he thinks of the body as a locus of subjectivity, as the origin of consciousness and as the place where knowledge is acquired (Merleau-Ponty, M. 2012: 146; 198-199). Bodily experience gives perception a significance beyond that established simply by thought. Merleau-Ponty’s aim is to show that embodiment does not result from just adding on “having a body”, but is rather a pre-linguistic experience that precedes all other characteristics,

“that world which precedes knowledge, of which knowledge always speaks” (Merleau-Ponty, M. 2012: ix).

His theory is an existentialist revision of Husserl’s transcendental phenomenology (Merleau-Ponty, M. 2012: vii-xviii). However, there are considerable differences between the two philosophers. Husserl “is constantly re-examining the possibility of a reduction”, although he is well aware of its impossibility (ibid xiv). For Merleau-Ponty instead, knowledge can only be gained from one’s “own particular point of view” (ibid viii). Importantly, he recognises that every experience, because embodied, is always local, limited (ibid, 67), or relational, rather than total, and is always situated in a pre-existent structure of meaning (ibid 52). Thinking about these conflicting arguments, draws attention to the difficulty of discussing artworks addressing human existential issues with a particular body. Phenomenological and affect theories may help to reconcile the apparent contradiction between accepting that knowledge is always located and personal, as it is gained through the individual experience, and the possibility of finding a space where these embodied experiences can be shared with other human beings.

Perception is linked to the assertion that we are our bodies (ibid: xii, 150), and that the lived experience in that body rejects the separation of the subject from object, from mind and body (ibid: xiii and 150). Hence, perception is not a negotiation between the world, the body, and the way the subject interprets the world, because interpretation, subject and world are intimately linked (ibid: 148; x-xi). When the mental and the material state of being are considered inextricably connected, human existence cannot be reduced to any particular pattern, because meaning is always acquired through the body and the body always already has meaning (Reynolds, J. 2004: 6). Merleau-Ponty does not deny the existence of the ‘mental’ aspects of life, but he highlights the importance of the fact that using the ‘mind’ is indivisible from the physical nature of the body. He developed a new concept of the body that is permitted to both think and perceive (Reynolds, J. 2004: 7).

Merleau-Ponty acknowledges that dualities, such as mind-body, self-world and inside-outside can be accommodated and used only when identified as constructs. Through the examination of lived experience, he discovers that perceptions are inseparable from the things that are perceived, and that thoughts, rather than forming the basis of our experience, emerge from a layer of primordial being. This primordial layer is characterised by connectedness between mind and body and between self and world (Merleau-Ponty, M. 2012: 219).

Merleau-Ponty is mainly concerned with embodiment, rather than the effects of history,

class, language, race, and gender. His account ignores important differences in embodied experience and, thus, his approach can be considered unable to capture our lived experience. Feminist works that highlight differences in female embodiment illustrate how his theory fails to consider diverse gendered experiences, continuing in the Western philosophical tradition of assuming a universal embodied experience and, thus, eliminating the need to discuss difference. Grosz, for instance, not only questions the value of the phenomenological model in rationalising women's experiences, but she also suggests that maybe women should develop a new theory (Grosz, E. 1994: 111).

Yet, even if Merleau-Ponty failed to take into account these different influences on embodiment, the ideas developed in *Phenomenology of Perception* offer an interesting insight into the problematic theory of gendered and racial subjectivity. In his approach, he constantly underlines the importance of taking into account the complexities and the positioning of different bodies and not just looking at bodies as 'neutral' beings in a given context. In addition, his rejection of intellectualism, empiricism and essentialism, as well as the recognition of the important role of experience in the 'formation of subjectivity', has been of great importance in the project of 're-defining' the female body. The work of Merleau-Ponty, offers to feminist theory the opportunity to theorise knowledge without excluding the feminine from the thought process (Alcoff, L. 2000, 265).

2.6 Sensing Sculpture

Questioning linguistic, and exclusively psychoanalytic models of subjectivity, feminist art criticism and scholarship turned to affect to highlight the role played by the body in the perception of images, sounds, smell, tastes and feelings (Papenburg, B. and Zarzycka, M., 2013: 8). This may be interpreted as a backward step towards binarism, which aligns femininity with feelings and emotions and masculinity with rationality and reason. However, this strategy can also be seen as a way to re-define terms that have been 'degraded' through their association with femininity. For Susan Best, for instance, this gendering of feeling may explain its almost complete absence in art history (Best, S. 2014: 4).

The 'affective turn' has been interpreted as both, a distancing of art criticism from post structuralism and psychoanalysis, as well as a strengthening of the connection between psychoanalysis and art, (Best, S. 2014: 6). For Griselda Pollock both the affective and the symbolic play an important role in the creation of art (Pollock, G 2013b: 32). De Bruyckere's

sculptures inhabit an in-between space, a place where “knowing and not-knowing” converge. As Caruth explains, “it is at the specific point at which knowing and not knowing intersect that the language of literature and the psychoanalytic theory of traumatic experiences precisely meet” (Caruth, C. 1996: 3). I argue, therefore, that both psychoanalysis and affect theory will complement each other when discussing the connection between these two contrasting states of knowledge. Moreover, it is in this intersection that we may be able to make sense of De Bruyckere’s fragmented human bodies.

Scholarly interest in the notion of affect was prompted by the work of the American psychologist Silvan Tomkins in the 1960s. He combined Freud’s psychoanalytic theory and Darwin’s theory of evolution to demonstrate that affect is an innate and complex structure of emotions and responses functioning as the “primary motivational system” (Tomkins, S. 2009: 164, 168). In his theory, affect refers to the biological and genetically transmitted part of the emotional mechanism that pre-exists in each of us. The affect system lies at the base of all human actions and its responses. These bodily responses become a means of communication between individuals. Affect can be activated both by internal / external and unlearned / learned “stimuli” (ibid 164).³⁰ The evolutionary and biological interpretations of human emotions have been heavily criticised, by both neuroscience and cultural studies, as it has been shown that what may provide happiness / suffering in one person/culture may not necessarily correspond to the emotions raised in another. Nonetheless, recent genetic research has found that the descendants of Holocaust survivors have been epigenetically marked by the enormous trauma, corroborating the hypothesis of a connection between external environments, traumatic events and genetics (Yehunda, R. et al. 2014).

Central to this study is Tomkins’ notion of resonance. Resonance describes the tendency of a person to experience the same affect when viewing the external signs of that affect on another person (Tomkins, S. 2008: 652). Many studies in neuroscience demonstrate the existence of inference or resonance, yet there has not been much interest in the humanities in developing a notion of ‘spectatorship’ that combines the complementary viewpoints of the unlearned ‘universals’ with the learned cultural specificity of emotions. I think that a theory which considers both viewpoints could contribute to the understanding of the viewers’

³⁰ The research on facial expressions has found evidence of six universal basic emotions in the West. The emotions are: fear, anger, happiness, sadness, surprise, and disgust with contempt (Ekman, P. 1992: 550). When basic emotions are considered genetically transmitted, bodily and automatic responses, their external expression becomes invested with a certain ‘essentialism’ (Leys, R. 2011: 438). There is, however, a growing body of scientific research confuting the existence of a finite number of basic emotions from which to scientifically generalise (ibid: 439).

engagement with artworks that reproduce the human body or part of it.

There are a number of contrasting definitions of terms such as affect, emotions and feelings; in part this depends upon how conscious these ‘emotional events’ are considered to be. Often described as a structure of ‘basic emotions’ located between the body, and consciousness, affect is considered as an energy originating from a personal and interior energy that attaches itself to objects (Bennett, J. 2012: 21-22). As a term, affect is often used as a synonym for emotions or defined as the physical expression of emotions and feeling. Irène Matthis, for instance, defines affect as an overarching term that contains both the notions of emotion and feeling (Matthis, I. 2000: 217). Brian Massumi, instead, distinguishes between the notions of feelings, emotions and affect. For him, feelings are personal as they are derived from previous personal experiences. Emotions, for him, are social because being the visible expression of feelings they tend to abide by the restrictions of social norms. Affect is a pre-personal unconscious and non-linguistic occurrence (Massumi, B. 1995: 88) and he defines it as the influence of the virtual on the actual and vice versa (Massumi, B. 1995: 96).³¹

In art discourses, affect is often equated to the spectators’ experience and the effects created by the art object upon their bodies. With its connection between the psychic and the somatic, between the cultural and the biological, between feeling and knowing, affect plays an essential role in the formation of meaning in De Bruyckere’s artwork. In her artwork the bodies are presented as open and defined by their capacity to affect. The human body is then potentially displaced, expanding corporeality with the psychic, the animal and the ‘interacting of bodies’. This extension blurs the boundaries between the biological, psychological and social. By setting up relations between the object and the space in which it has been directly placed, between presence and absence and between inside and outside, De Bruyckere’s work takes advantage of the embodied connection between space, body, art object and senses.

A constant between all the diverging definitions and theorisation of affect is the belief that affect is an unconscious bodily process, which takes place before cognition (Leys, R. 2011: 443). Affect will therefore be helpful in understanding De Bruyckere’s artwork, which plays

³¹ A possible link between the virtual and human perception is provided by an empirical study, in which scientists noted contradicting results in the children’s reactions to different versions of a short TV program. From the results of this experiment Massumi concluded that there is no connection between content and intensity in the reception of images. Describing intensity as a non-conscious automatic bodily reaction, he claimed that intensity cannot signify, but may change the meaning, (Massumi, B. 1995: 84-85). Pointing out the incompleteness of ‘symbolic’ approaches to understanding images, he called for the integration of ‘intensity into cultural theory, (ibid: 87), which he equates to affect, (ibid: 88), leading to a clear distinction between the notions of feelings, emotions and affect. He defines affect as the influence of the virtual on the actual and vice versa, “the simultaneous participation of the virtual in the actual and the actual in the virtual, as one arises from and returns to the other. Affect is this two-sidedness as seen from the side of the actual thing, as couched in its perceptions and cognitions”, (Massumi, B. 195: 96).

on the spectators' immediate and visceral reactions. This immediate physical and emotional engagement, which temporarily precedes the conceptual understanding of her artwork, also involves haptic visuality and becomes an experience of imaginative touching (Sobchack, V. 2004: 67-70). Recognising the importance of all the senses in the perception and interpretation of artwork may draw attention to both the personal and the shared knowledge involved in experiencing art.

Additionally, the recent discovery of 'mirror neurons' in human beings may influence the debate whether it is ever possible to share some embodied experiences with other human beings. Scientists have shown how for individuals watching another person moving a body part, the corresponding part of the brain becomes engaged and the muscles become unconsciously more active as if they would have been doing the movement themselves. The discovery of 'mirror neurons' explains the biological mechanism behind the unconscious mimetic body behaviour and underlines the importance of physical human interaction for healthy development (Fracari, M. 2011: 77). The repercussions of this discovery on the empathetic responses of spectators to artwork have not yet been considered. However, Freedman predicts that these neuroscientific discoveries will question the primacy of cognition and he states that "a crucial element of aesthetic response consists of the activation of embodied mechanisms encompassing the simulation of actions, emotions and corporeal sensation, and that these mechanisms are universal" (Freedberg, D and Gallese, V. 2007: 197). In the context of this thesis, the mirror neurons theory, similar to Tomkins' 'resonance', will support the idea that human beings can empathise with the pain and suffering of another human being.

During the last ten years, neuroscientists have shown an increased interest in researching the connection between art and empathy. The interest in empathy, which started in the nineteenth century as a contribution to aesthetic and then spread to psychology, has more recently caught the interest of neuroscientists.³² Indeed, the empathetic response to artwork has recently gained renewed attention in the Sciences with the publication of several articles showing the connection between having pain and seeing images of other people suffering. Out of this research, two approaches emerged: the mirror neuron system, as described above,

³² In 1873 the art historian Robert Vischer introduced the term "Einfühlung" in his book *Über das Optische Formengefühl: in Beitrag zur Aesthetic*. 'Einfühlung', which is often translated as 'feeling-into', related to the affective personal emotions and experiences felt by the viewer when confronted with an art object (Cambray, J. 2009: 70). Psychologists' interest in empathy started in 1909, with the German philosopher of aesthetics, Theodor Lipps and Edward Titchener translation of the German term 'Einfühlung', as 'empathy' into English (Gaut, B. 2010: 138).

which presupposes automated responses upon seeing movements; and on the other side, the alternative neural networks (Schott, G.D. 2015: 812). There is now evidence that sometimes empathy is conveyed without engaging mirror neurons. This happens especially when viewers are presented with well known prevailing images or histories from within their culture that reference the notion of suffering. In this case, pain is mediated through a metaphor (ibid, 813).

As far as De Bruyckere's art is concerned, both approaches will be useful in explaining the viewer's empathy towards her fragmented figures. On one hand, the alternative neural networks model may shed light on the reasons behind the spectators' emotional investment when viewing images which reference Christian iconography or old masters aimed at triggering the spectators' emotional responses. In this case, the visual analogy involves cognitive processes. Empathy is evoked through a complex convergence of knowledge and visual clues. On the other hand, mirror neurons can begin to explain the spectators' feelings when presented with impossibly contrived bodies, as most of us have experienced bodily pain and can refer to it. Therefore, combining both scientific theories will help to form a better understanding of the spectators' emotional reactions provoked by De Bruckere's artworks.

2.7 Sexual Difference

The connection between power and the visible body as knowledge will be a key aspect in the discussion of De Bruyckere's sculptures of fragmented bodies. Power and knowledge are always presented together in Foucault's writing and the subject is produced by their combined influence. Relevant for this inquiry, therefore, is the fact that power relies on various disciplines of knowledge with which to order 'humanity' into specific categories. How do these different groupings influence the way in which we interpret, define or look at the body, and who has the right to determine 'what the body should be?'

Judging by the rise of interventions on the body, both surgically and through a strict regime of diet and exercise, we can presume that many people are still trying to emulate the 'ideal body' imposed upon us by contemporary society. The rise in popularity of plastic surgery could also be seen to some extent as a connection between body parts and the 'biological body' (Shilling, C. 2003: 6). Plastic surgery enables people to add body parts or take away unwanted parts, such as fat, flesh or bones. At the heart of this desire to alter the appearance of the body usually lies the desire to reach the idealized version of the self. The possibilities that plastic surgery offers may give the impression of the 'human biological' body

as malleable and mutable. It becomes then, an incomplete project in need of completion where fashionable physical characteristics are encouraged at the expense of physical characteristics considered to be less appealing (Mirzoeff, N. 1995: 2). However, the body is not only subject to visual conformity and ‘improvements’, as Foucault argues, “subjected, used, transformed and improved” (Foucault, M. 1991: 136), but it is also a site of struggle and biopolitics, where power is insidiously and subtly exercised through control in the form of visual parameters of acceptability.

Foucault points out that living within a pre-existing system of ‘normativities’, creates a strong desire to behave in certain ways, defining in this way the boundaries of what is proper and acceptable. Indeed, the ability to produce the desired results may be at its peak when the subjects are ‘self-disciplined’ and become ‘docile’ (Foucault, M. 1988: 18).

Yet, a self-identity that has the body and its image as the chief constituent elements may bring the limitations and vulnerability of the body to the fore. The attempt to sculpt the body into compliance with social ideals will inevitably end in failure, no matter how much dieting, exercise, surgical procedures, and technologies are available to re-shape it. Ultimately, the body as a living entity, a product of evolution, will overrule all our efforts and wishes, taking us towards old age and death. In agreement with Shilling, I see the obsession contemporary society has to maintain for as long as possible the young and fit body as an attempt to ‘cheat’ the inevitable death (Shilling, C. 2003: 7).

Foucault, similarly to feminist theorists, criticised biological determinism, medicine and psychology as instances of social control. He considered the body and more precisely sexuality, vital for the understanding of the working of power relations. Nevertheless, feminist scholars criticised him for not acknowledging the role of ‘patriarchy’ in the construction of femininity. In his theories, the body is mostly unmarked by gender and he considers it as a useful but general tool with which to denounce and highlight the hidden connections between disciplinary practices and the manipulation of people. In his analysis, power seems to function as an abstract force. Although he admits that power may impact differently on women (Foucault, M. 1998: 104-105), he does not acknowledge male dominance in history and the ‘problematic construction’ of the female body in a male dominated society. For this reason, many feminists have argued that Foucault is not of particular use to their cause, and as Linda Singer suggests, “by failing to leave a place for a discourse of women's difference, the effect of Foucault's textual strategies is to reconstitute self-effacing masculinity as a unitary voice of authority” (Singer, L. 1993: 157). In his analysis “of power and knowledge centering on sex”,

however, he does mention the importance of medical and familial contexts in the construction of the female body, especially regarding the “hysterisation of women's bodies” and the “socialisation of procreative behaviour” (Foucault, M. 1998: 104).³³

For many feminists, identities are anchored in sexual categorisation that, unlike race and class, is fixed, making sexual difference an essential part of their subjectivity. As Rosi Braidotti writes, “being a woman is always already there as the ontological precondition for my existential becoming a subject” (Braidotti, R. 2013: 187-188; Grosz, E. 1994: 207-209). Feminist-theorists point out how most conventions determining the way men and women behave, are social constructions that have almost no connection to our corporeal sexes, underlining the significant role played by representation in “continually re-negotiating feminine and masculine identities” (Kelly, M. in Jones A. 2010: 86).

Before discussing the role that sex and gender play in De Bruyckere’s figures, it is necessary to review feminist debates about the representation of the female body. It comes as no surprise that the representation of the female body in art and the media has been a topic of intense debate in feminist circles. The body and its representation has been a particularly important tool used to point out the ways in which power relations and binary thinking are intrinsic to our language system and culture.

The revival of the body as subject matter in contemporary art is indebted to the work of feminist scholars and artists. During the late 1960s, some female artists started to use the female body to question issues of gender (Beugnet, M. 2013: 180), and to enquire into issues surrounding ‘female experiences’. These artists explored and discussed their personal experiences as a way of fighting inequalities and they drew attention to the binary pair male / female, which creates a structure in society where masculinity is considered the norm, while femininity is defined as the ‘other’. In the work of several female artists of this period, the body emerged as a powerful tool with which to explore and question the role and implications of representing the female body as ‘other’ and creating an alternative, politically engaged representation. For ‘feminist-influenced’ art practices, the body, especially the female body, with its shifting meaning, was more than an ideological issue and took centre stage as a site of struggle (O’Reilly, 2009: 39; Battista, K. 2013: 1,12-14).

³³ Although the specificity of sexual differences seem not to be a concern in Foucault’s theory, it should be acknowledged that, the link between body and power developed by Foucault has been of paramount importance to feminism in understanding and challenging the ‘subordination’ of women. In the 1990s feminist writers widely used the work of Foucault to demonstrate how power relations involved in disciplinary practices are used to control the female body. They pointed out that there is a gendered component to power and that, the different forms of domination to which women are subjected, frequently appear to be chosen freely (Foucault, M. 1988: 18).

For women artists during the 1970s, the use of the female body presented several difficulties; the nude, due to historical connections to ‘traditional representations’, carried several connotations. The female form was seen as either symbolic of classical beauty (Jones, A. 1212: 65), allegorical, or as an objectified body to fit the fetishistic pleasure structure of the predominantly male spectator (O’Reilly, S. 2009, 13-17; Jones, A. 2012: 69).³⁴ What makes representations in which the female body is either objectified for the male gaze or idealised to symbolise a concept problematic, is the fact that women are stripped of their subjectivity. This contributes to the difference between the representational modes of male and female bodies. Men are portrayed as historically anchored and legitimised through profession and social position. Women, instead, are made ahistorical through mythological metaphors or objectification (Kraut, G. 1989: 348).

It is important to note that although feminist artists were opposed to conventional ways of representing the female body they, nevertheless, disagreed in their reactions to it. Some female artists avoided the representation of the female body and adopted a conceptual strategy, employing a representation that did not objectify the body of women but rather represented women as subjects.³⁵ Their work reproduced the traces of the human body. The reticence in using the female form to raise questions about gender was theoretically supported by Laura Mulvey’s writings on the problematic relationship between the male gaze and the female form, as well as Mary Douglas’s writings on anthropology.³⁶ Indeed, Mary Kelly considered it as absolutely necessary, not only to question the representation of the female body in a patriarchal society but more importantly, to devise strategies with which to change the way women and femininity were perceived. In representing bodily experiences without using the female body, those artists were trying to give a voice to women. The non-figurative representation of the body provided the opportunity to “refer to a heterogeneous system of signs – indexical, symbolic, and iconic ... and invoking the non-spectacular, the sensory, the somatic, in the visual field” (Kelly, M. in Jones, A. 2010: 85). However, some female artists found the refusal to represent the female body and female sexuality too limiting, especially

³⁴ There are many examples in the history of art where the female figure symbolises abstract ideas, such as faith, prudence, justice, hope or temperance, liberty and democracy. In allegorical representations, either mythological inherited from the Greek and Roman age, or reinvented after the constitution of the modern state, the female form embodies ideals, values and principles and therefore something different from itself. The allegoric use of the female body has been criticised by feminist scholars as being not representative of the life of women as well as not contributing to the understanding of female experiences. As Sigrid Weigel attests “the allegorical picture is emptied of emotions and life, as it does not refer to a concrete woman” (Weigel, S. 1990: 170).

³⁵ Mary Kelly, Susan Hiller, Judy Clark...to name but a few.

³⁶ Laura Mulvey in her article published in 1975, ‘Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema’, analyses the ‘male-gaze’ applying Freudian psychoanalysis (Mulvey, L. 1975).

with regard to the “possibility of addressing important issues of women’s sexual pleasure” (Chadwick, W. in Robinson, H. 2001: 525).

These artists often used their own bodies to make persuasive and strong statements about gender and sexuality.³⁷ These artists took control over their bodies by rejecting the notion of the woman as a model for a male artist and creating a situation where the woman was model and producer at the same time (Battista, K. 2013: 12-51).

De Bruyckere’s female figures cannot easily be classified, as they seem to distance themselves from both the traditional representation that sees the naked female body as docile and objectified for the male gaze, and the depiction of women symbolising abstract concepts, allegories or ideal beauty. The artist’s interest in the human figure coincides with the shift in the representation of the body that was happening in contemporary art during the mid 1980s and early 1990s, in which the new generation of artists began exploring the body as a means to convey the idea of a multitude of subjectivities. With it they were aiming to provide a more powerful tool of intervention than commenting on or seeking to reverse the male gaze through strategies that avoided the direct use of the female body.

During the 1980s and 1990s, the body was not only represented as wounded and fragmented but was also imbued with its particularity of gender, ethnicity, class and race. The essentialist notion of femininity was criticised for privileging the experiences of white middle class women and grouping all women into a single category, thus excluding the plurality of points of view that all these differences could bring (Hartsock, N. 1990: 15; Featherstone, L. in Burns, L. 2006: 82). The need to express and acknowledge differences between women had already emerged in 1980’s feminism, when particular groups of women such as black, lesbian and working class feminists, did not feel represented by a feminism that they defined as heterosexual, middle-class and white (Young, M. 1994: 714).

American postmodern feminists highlighted the many differences between women and demonstrated a profound scepticism towards claims of universality. They saw, in the postmodern project, the opportunity to include plurality in the re-definition of the ‘category woman’ through incorporation of other important categories such as race, ethnicity, class, and sexuality, (Hartsock, N. 1990: 16).³⁸ Judith Butler, for instance, questioned sexual difference and argued that gender is constructed through our own repetition of performances that imitate

³⁷ Carolee Schneemann, Marina Abramovic, Hannah Wilke, Ana Mendieta, Cindy Sherman, Bobby Baker, Rose Finn-Kelcey, Catherine Elwes and Sally Potter.

³⁸ Feminism in the United Kingdom was based on the left and always had strong class critique. Black feminists were at work from the 60’s but were marginalised, to varying extents, by structural racism.

the dominant conventions and expectation within society. Gender identity then is ‘performed’ by the subject, enacted through a variety of social and cultural roles rather than being something biologically determined (Butler, J. 2007: 136).

Where Foucault referred to self-imposed practices of the body, Butler went further by adding her concept of performativity. The idea that identity is ‘performed’ by the subject enacted through a variety of social and cultural roles rather than being something biologically determined, has dominated feminist theory from the beginning of the 1990s. Butler rejected stable gender categories altogether and initiated a shift in feminist thinking. She raised doubts about the very distinctions between gender and sex, as even the perception of physical sexual differences is influenced by social conventions. For her, sex is not a biological given on which society enforces gender. Sex, for Butler,

is an ideal construct which is forcibly materialised through time. It is not a simple fact or static condition of a body, but a process whereby regulatory norms materialise 'sex' and achieve this materialisation through a forcible reiteration of those norms (Butler, J. 2011: xii).

For her, reality is determined by language, so that in the end it is not possible even to think or speak about sex without imposing linguistic norms as “there is no reference to a pure body which is not at the same time a further formation of that body” (Butler, J. 2011: xix). The very act of speaking about sex is bound to impose cultural or ideological norms. When we theorise about biology and nature, we have already absorbed the values and structures of the culture we live in (Butler, J. 2011: xiv). In fact, identification of nature as pre-existing culture is itself a representation produced within culture at a specific time. Judith Butler influenced a whole field of inquiries and debates on the concepts of subjectivity and the body, inspiring new movements such as queer and transgender theory.

Queer theory, emerging from the fields of gay, lesbian and feminist studies, significantly influenced artists and theorist across the humanities. Inspired and influenced by the work of Foucault, Queer theory combines the feminist idea that gender is part of the essential self with the notion of the socially constructed nature of sexual acts and identities emerging from gay/lesbian studies. Discourses in visual theory from the early 1990s to 2000s shifted from a binary psychoanalytic model toward a more multifaceted method in order to explain identification as multiple, fluid and performative, also pointing out the construction of aspects such as gender and sexuality.

Whereas, initially, queer studies focused on the binary division between ‘natural’ and ‘unnatural’ behaviour, with respect to homosexuality, rejecting the hetero-homo binary and dismissing the conception of sexualities as non-essential by rethinking the post-structuralist ideas on identity. Queer theory went on to expand its focus to include any kind of sexual activity, highlighting the importance of sexuality as a political matter and aiming to provide an approach open to all those oppressed by the hegemony of heterosexual norms.

Key to this approach is the questioning of the links between sexuality and identity, and also the political repercussion of an identity defined by gender and sexuality (Jagose, A. 1996). Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, for instance, underlines the central connection between societies’ socio-economic structures and sexual politics, and she argues for a parallel change in all those structures and policies (Sedgwick, E. 1985: 3-4).

In 1995, Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner provided their perspective and context on the current ‘condition’ of queer theory, stating that it resists definitions (Berlant, L. & Warner M. 1995: 343). At its best, queer theory extends beyond gender matters to include human nature and human potential as a whole, pointing out the silently accepted normativity present in all fields of knowledge, (ibid 348). Knowledge is constructed through language, where heterosexuality is considered the norm and any divergence from it, such as homosexuality, as ‘queer’. Queer is “radically anticipatory” (ibid 344), “refuses to subordinate emergent cultures to whatever is considered common culture as most of it is shaped by heteronormativity” (ibid 349). Indeed, as mentioned above, the ‘queer movement’ is at its best when not only sexual norms are challenged but also when it presents a broader challenge to other norms, as David Halperin explains, “queer is by definition whatever is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant. There is nothing in particular to which it necessarily refers. It is an identity without essence” (Halperin, D.1997: 62).

If gender is constructed, imposed on a body by conventions predetermined by society, then the grouping of a variety of subjectivities into fixed categories of gender becomes problematic, if not impossible. Moreover, for Butler, the feminist project of empowerment through a formation of the category ‘woman’ creates exclusion and reinforces the binary masculine/feminine (Butler. 2007: 19). Claims of ‘women’ as a category then, have to be replaced with a more intricate and multifaceted notion of social identity, in which gender is seen as just one among many components in the formation of identity. This emphasis on the multiplicity of possibilities, discourses and choices, challenges the essentialist view and positions the subject as always contradictory, fragmentary, and in a state of transformation.

Women's race, class and socio-economic differences are invested with greater importance, alongside their involvement with patriarchal culture and their efforts at resistance (Bordo S. 2003: 23; Brooks A. 2005: 21). Indeed, for many women, these categories seem to play a more defining role than gender in the formation of their identities (Freedman, E. 2006: 162). It is in this context that, at the end of 1980s, in the United States feminism diversified into an agenda of differentiated identity-politics in which subjectivities were seen as multiple. They acknowledged that theories are always only a partial perspective which is deeply influenced by the narrator's / creator's cultural background.

Queer theory overlaps in many ways with feminism; however, it is not an alternative for those feminists who feel that the category 'woman' has some real meaning. Where feminists, Foucault, and queer theorists agree though, is in their emphasis on the culturally constructed quality of the body and 'sexuality', rather than positioning them as naturally determined. However, for Chris Shilling, interpreting the body as an exclusively cultural and social construction, encompasses the danger of removing the materiality of human embodiment from the theoretical concern, reducing the debate of human needs and desires into a debate on cultural preferences (Shilling, C. 2003: ix). He backs a combination of both naturalistic and constructionist approaches to the body in order to overcome the mind/body and nature/culture binary (Shilling, C. 2003: 15).

For Hartsock, instead, postmodernism does not live up to its promise to break with universal claims. She describes postmodern theories "as situated knowledge of a particular group –Euro-American, masculine, ... racially ...[and] economically privileged" (Hartsock, N. 1990: 19 and 23). Iris M Young, too, is suspicious of postmodern gender-scepticism that sees gender identity as multiple, in which the problem of the conceptualisation of the category 'woman' is solved by adding other categories (Young, I. M. 1994: 720-721).

The new generation of feminists is still committed to inclusiveness and to an intersectional and multi-perspective based version of feminism. For them, the personal is still political, and with it they point out the feminist's fallacy, during the early second wave, of claiming a "common identity based on shared experiences" (Snyder, C. 2008: 186). Interestingly, not all feminists indiscriminately challenged the possibility of discussing identity through the formation of categories, as long as we remain aware of the 'intersectionality' between them. Crenshaw for instance writes:

Through an awareness of intersectionality, we can better acknowledge and ground the differences among us and negotiate the means by which these differences will find expression in constructing group politics (Crenshaw, K. in Jones, A. 2012: 129).

Indeed, for many feminists, the absence of the option of grouping women into a category makes conceptualising the oppression of women and their lack of opportunities as a structured process inherent in our society, more difficult. For this reason, several feminist scholars hold on to the category ‘woman’ in order to find out the role of sex and gender in producing unequal power relations between the ‘sexes’ (McNay, L. 1992: 35; Young, I. M. 1994: 718). Moreover, the ‘theoretical heterogeneity’, that relegates gender to one among a multiplicity of other differences, may incur the danger of giving voice to the same disembodied and detached positioned universal individual that we inherited from the ‘Enlightenment’, which then contributes in this way to the upholding of the status quo they are striving to redress. For this reason, as Susan Bordo explains, “feminists must hold fast to the analytical category of gender” (Bordo, S. 2003: 229).

The debates over whether it is possible to group women into a category and the variety of strands within these debates illustrate the complexity and conflict within feminist studies. These contrasting arguments highlight how emphasising gender difference may help reinforce stereotypes, such as the female as passive, weak and emotional, but at the same time, erasing gender difference makes it more difficult to confront institutional sex discrimination. Moreover, for the purpose of this investigation, feminist gender discourses are particularly relevant in regard to the role that representations play in maintaining gender stereotypes, as well as drawing attention to who has the right to speak for whom (Spivak, G. 2010).

The multiple and sometimes contrasting Western feminist narratives formed during the last fifty years, point out how these differing opinions are “deeply entwined, partial and motivated” (Hemmings, C. 2011: 132). Hemmings shows how not only the content of the arguments in feminist theory, but also the way the content is told influences the “narrative of gender”. She divides the Western feminist narrative into three main storylines: The “progress”, the “loss” and the “return” narrative (Hemmings, C. 2011: 15-16).

Told chronologically, the ‘progress narrative’ portrays feminism as an agent of positive change in which shifts and changes are seen as improvements of the “older approaches seen as lacking” (Hemming, C. 2011: 35). In fact, the critiques of lesbian feminists and feminist of colour in the 1980s are seen as challenging the essentialist notion of the ‘woman’ as a

universalised subject of feminism of the 1970s. In pointing to their exclusion from the group 'women', they introduced the critiques of poststructuralists, postcolonialists and queer theorists and with it the diversity in the feminist theories and debates (ibid 39-40).

The 'loss narrative' divides feminism into the same time periods as the 'progress narrative', but values the various periods within feminism differently. The exponents of the 'loss narrative' lament the loss of alignment between theory and activism. In fact, the 1970s and 1980s are celebrated as a period in which feminist theory and political activities overlapped. The debates initiated in the 1980s by lesbian and black feminists, are interpreted as a contribution to both feminist theory and politics and not as a critique. For the proponents of the 'loss narrative', however, the 1990s represents the beginning of the disconnection between the political feminist aims and the feminist political movement. They consider the entrance and success of feminist theory within the academy, and poststructuralism with its "language games", the main causes of the depoliticisation of feminism (ibid 87). The 'loss narrative' sees the emphasis on multiplicity and queer theory as hindering feminist endeavours, and locates the future of feminism in a return to the past (ibid 65-66).

The 'return narrative' proposes a middle way between the 'progress' and 'loss narratives'. While it recognises the vital role played by poststructuralist critiques of 1970s feminism, it also concedes that the 'linguistic' and 'queer' turn in feminism, which side-lined identity politics and sexuality, was taken too far (ibid 90). The 'return narrative' will be helpful for situating De Bruyckere's fragmented figures within a Western feminist discourse, as it brings a "renewed interest in materiality", highlighting the significance of the body through its focus on embodied and everyday experiences (ibid 97). Additionally, in De Bruyckere's artwork, themes and aesthetics 'typical' of different feminist 'narratives' seem to co-exist. The body, in her figures, is presented as open and as a site of multiple meanings. In fact, her figures inhabit a liminal space, not only through materiality and form but also by undoing the sex and gender boundaries. Her figures, however, cannot be read as consistently 'gender-neutral'. This ambiguity in the representation and reading of the sexed body in her artwork illustrates the difficulties in conveying 'shared' existential issues with a particular and sexed body.

De Bruyckere has undoubtedly benefited from the developments initiated and fostered by feminist scholars and artists, as in her artwork she engages closely with themes regarding the body, sexuality and desires. Moreover, her artwork has increasingly been exhibited alongside

the artwork of other female artists.³⁹ As third wave feminists contend, “feminism is out there and is part of everybody’s life, even if it is not always noticed or mentioned” (Snyder, C. 2008: 178). In fact, many contemporary artists, both male and female, make use of themes and strategies introduced by feminist artists as these techniques and materials have since entered mainstream art practices. As Kathy Battista concluding her inquiry into feminist art in London in the 1970s writes, “the younger generation ... have thrived without any association with the women’s liberation movement, although many of the latter’s theme are implicit in their work” (Battista, K. 2013: 159).

I have devoted a significant section of this chapter to theories of subjectivity that provide a model with which to understand the functioning of the body and the idea of the decentered self, highlighting its fragmentary state and the disputed belief in the subject’s autonomy. I have started by introducing the Cartesian mind/body dualism pointing out the influence of binary oppositions in the construction of subjectivity and the problems that this disembodied conception of subjectivity creates.

I have presented three models of subjectivity: The psychoanalytical, the anti-subjective and the phenomenological theory of subjectivity. The psychoanalytical view of subjectivity, built upon the psychoanalytical work of Freud and Lacan, relies on the possibility of finding out the structure of subjectivity and the processes influencing its formation. I have also discussed theories that draw upon the psychoanalytical models of both Freud and Lacan, such as Kristeva’s notion of the subject as an ‘open-system’, and ‘Trauma theory’, developed in the 1980s and 1990s.

The anti-subjective view of the self (M. Foucault), dependent upon political and cultural requirements, implies that the subject has no knowable content in itself. Subjectivity, therefore, cannot exist outside of the predetermined power relationships. I have also discussed feminist philosophers that have utilised a ‘Foucauldian’ perspective in order to think about

³⁹ In 2012 De Bruyckere exhibited in ‘Menschenzellen / Human Capsule’ alongside Phyllida Barlow, Louise Bourgeois, Rachel Khedoori, Maria Lassnig, Carol Rama, Loredana Sperini and Alina Szapocznikow. Kunstmuseum St. Gallen, (2012). Kunstmuseum St. Gallen, (2012). Menschenzellen | Human Capsules: Acht Künstlerinnen aus der Sammlung Ursula Hauser. 25. Februar – 12. August 2012, Lokremise. Available from <http://www.kunstmuseumsg.ch/unser-programm/archiv/menschenzellen-human-capsules.html> [Accessed 30.11. 2015]. Between the 9th of June and 11th of November 2013 De Bruyckere’s artwork was presented in an exhibition at the Palais des Papes in Avignon, under the heading of “Les Papesses”, alongside work of four other female contemporary artists, exploring the role of the body, pleasure, suffering and death. The artists represented in this exhibition were: Camille Claudel, Louise Bourgeois, Kiki Smith, Collection Lambert in Avignon (2013). Les Papesses. *Collection Lambert*. Available from <http://www.lespapesses.com/gb.htm> [Accessed 18.02.2015].

bodies in terms of sexual difference to show how subjectivity is constructed by a combination of disciplinary and regulatory powers.

The phenomenological approach to the body, as a medium for the perception and understanding of the world, plays a fundamental role in the formation of subjectivity. I have discussed how, placing our embodied experiences at the centre of subjectivity formation, provides a valid way of ‘thinking through the body’ and sensing artworks, like De Bruyckere’s figures, that place emphasis on bodily interactions between artwork and viewer. I have argued that using affect, which can create a space for art’s content outside of discourse and language, may help to overcome the limitations of poststructuralist approaches to ‘understanding the world and our place in it’. As a way forward, I have suggested connecting various theoretical viewpoints to allow the coexistence of a cognitive ‘universal’ - positing some shared / collective human bodily experiences - and cultural situatedness, which recognises that knowledge is always contingent on historical, social and cultural experiences.

3 Sensing Sculpture

Berlinde De Bruyckere was born in 1964 in Ghent, Belgium, where she studied art at the ‘Sint-Lukas Instituut’ from 1982 to 1986. In 1990, she was awarded the ‘Jeune Peinture Belge Award’ (Ansen, S. 2012: 175). She came to international attention with the five life-size sculptures of horses (image 3-10) titled *In Flanders Fields* (2000) that she created for the War Museum in Ypres. She was subsequently invited to participate in the 2003 Italian Pavilion at the Venice Biennale.¹ She has exhibited internationally in several museums and in many public spaces. In 2013, she was selected to represent Belgium at the 2013 Venice Biennale.² She works and lives in Ghent, where she shares a studio with her husband, the artist Peter Buggenhout (Bozzi, N. 2013).

De Bruyckere is inspired by a variety of sources from Christian narrative, myths, art history and images circulated in contemporary mass media. Her artwork is often created for a particular site, which with its history impacts on form and meaning of the work. However, her consistent interest in themes concerning the human body and loss can be interpreted as her ‘site of investigation’. She often incorporates themes of war, loss and human suffering in her artwork and she always presents the body as fragmented, vulnerable and in a state of Ovidian transformation. Through the close relationship to the human body, her work forms a link to the knowledge of the biological body and its inexorable transformation. In fact, her figures, inhabiting the space between life and death, are suspended in a liminal place. She addresses ‘the human condition’ through the affect created by subject matter, form, materials, sculptural process and presentation. The vulnerability of the human body, the fragility of its borders, its transience and the inability to communicate emotions and sensations, such as pain, suffering and loneliness are at the core of De Bruyckere’s art practice. As the artist explains, she

¹ Wuyts, E. (2013). Press release: Pavillion of Belgium at 55th International Art Exhibition Di Venezia. *ARTER*. Available from http://www.smak.be/files/S.M.A.K._PressRelease_BerlindeDeBruyckere_20130228.pdf [Accessed 5 July 2013].

² Since the late 1980s, De Bruyckere has been invited to participate in several solo and group exhibitions, both in Belgium and internationally. She came to international attention with her work “The Black Horse” at the Italian Pavilion, Venice Biennale in 2003 and the 4th Berlin Biennial. She had numerous solo shows: Hauser & Wirth (Zurich, 2004); La Maison Rouge (Paris, 2005); Kunsthalle Dusseldorf (2006); Royal Academy of Fine Arts (Ghent, 2007); Galleria Continua (San Gimignano, 2007); Yvon Lambert (New York, 2008); Gallery Yvon Lambert (New York, 2008); Espace Claude Berri (Paris, 2008); Spedale di Santa Fina (San Gimignano, 2009); Hauser & Wirth Colnaghi (London, 2009); Galleria Continua, Le Moulin (Boissy-le-Chatel, France, 2010); Hauser & Wirth (Zurich 2010); Galleria Continua (San Gimignano, 2010); Librairie St. Hubert, (Brussels, 2011); DHC/ART Foundation for Contemporary Art (Montreal, 2011); Kunstmuseum Bern (Bern, 2011); Kunstmuseum Moritzburg (Halle, 2011); Galleria Continua (China, 2012); Hauser & Wirth (Zurich, 2012); Hauser & Wirth Outdoor Sculpture (London, 2012); De Pont Museum of Contemporary Art (Tilburg, 2012); Arter (Istanbul, 2012); ACCA (Melbourne, 2012); 55th Biennale di Venezia (Venice, 2013); Kunsthau Graz (Graz, 2013); Hauser & Wirth (London, 2014); S.M.A.K (Ghent, 2014); La Maison Rouge (Paris, 2014); Musée d’Art Moderne et Contemporain (Strasbourg, 2015); Kunsthau Bregenz (Bregenz, 2015); Kunstraum Dornbirn (Dornbirn, 2015); Gemeentemuseum Den Haag (The Hague, 2015); National Gallery of Iceland (Reykjavik, 2016); Leopold Museum (Vienna, 2016); Hauser & Wirth (New York, 2016).

highlights often ignored themes in order to draw attention to the limitations of language to communicate physical and psychological suffering. Her ultimate goal is to create a visual language with which to promote the ‘shareability’ of these emotions (De Bruyckere, B. in Kathleen, B. 2011).

The fractured, vulnerable and open bodies become then a vehicle with which to visually express not only the uncertainty and vulnerability of human existence, but also to convey the fluidity and multiplicity of the self. Her artwork, although often inspired by real events, does not function as a representation of the event but rather highlights social, cultural and political issues by exploiting their interconnection to affect and emotions.

3.1 Thinking through all the Senses

This chapter explains how viewers’ receptions of the body fragments presented in De Bruyckere’s sculptures are particularly related to an embodied form of perception, evoking a multitude of physical and emotional reactions. In fact, De Bruyckere’s representations of vulnerable and fragmented human bodies seem to be based on compassionate empathy, which heightens intra-subjective awareness through affective knowledge. However, while endorsing the ‘affective turn’ in making sense of artwork beyond psychoanalytical accounts, I will contend that a combination of both the psychoanalytical and the affective model may help to overcome the limits of both theories by introducing sense perception into the psychological interpretation, and the concept of repression into the affective one (Marks, L. U. 2013: 146).

What I wish to explore in this chapter, by focusing on De Bruyckere’s sculptures, which combine wax emulating human skin and flesh with soft materials, is the way in which the representation of the body, particularly in sculptural practice, may be seen as playing on the viewers’ knowledge of their own body and the memory of the senses. Embodiment and sense perception have become an integral part of the way we look at and interpret sculptures (Sobchack, V. 2004, Marks, L. 2000, 2013; Bennett, J. 2005; Blackmann, L. & Venn, C. 2010). Scholars such as Vivian Sobchack, Laura Marks and Jill Bennett have highlighted the power of the ‘haptic’ to evoke known sensations that were previously experienced through other senses. I will devote particular attention to the way in which the ‘whole sensorium’, rather than just visuality, influences the reception and interpretation of sculptures of body parts. These multisensory reactions call upon memories of the senses in order to produce an

embodied experience. The theoretical concept of ‘haptic visuality’³, will be used as a tool to suggest that vision can also be tactile. The study of affect will be of particular relevance in this chapter, helping to determine the role played by empathy in the spectators’ bodily and intellectual engagement with Berlinde De Bruyckere’s sculptures.⁴ Support for the importance of materiality to the embodied experience of the artwork will be gained by examining the relationship between materiality and the body, both in the way the spectator’s body is engaged by materials and how materials themselves can be used as bodily metaphors. It will be argued that the materials employed to create these representations of body parts, such as wax, plaster, human hair or horse skin, are important elements in the construction of meaning. I will highlight the way in which Berlinde De Bruyckere’s sculptures, through form, materiality and sculptural techniques, create connections between the body of the spectator and the body represented. Additionally, the process of casting will not be dismissed as just a traditional sculptural technique, but will be invested with the role of ‘meaning-making’ in the finished artwork. De Bruyckere’s casts, although indexical, contradict the perfect likeness inherent in the casting process as her sculptures are created through the combination of several slightly different casts of the same body parts.

Berlinde De Bruyckere’s sculptures can be seen as exceeding visibility, not only provoking a chain of sensory reactions but also acting as a catalyst for our attention through an overstimulation of the senses. Subject matter, process and materials in her art, can all be understood as contributing to the enhancement of the spectators’ bodily involvement, as well as igniting cognitive responses, such as memory and identification. Her sculptures invite personal memories, not only through bodily similarities, but also through non-visual and embodied knowledge. Previous knowledge acquired through the senses, such as touch, taste and smell, play an important role in the way in which the spectator engages with the artwork. As Marks maintains, “when verbal and visual representation is saturated, meaning seeps into bodily and other dense, seemingly silent registers” (Marks, L. 2000: 5). However, I will assert that in the case of Berlinde De Bruyckere’s representations of fragmented bodies, these ‘seemingly silent registers’ are always already present alongside the visual. Of course every

³ For Laura Marks haptic visuality is a multi-sensory embodied experience of an image, where the emphasis lies in the spectator’s capacity “to perceive” (Marks, L. 2000: 162). As she contends, “while optical perception privileges the representational power of the image, haptic perception privileges the material presence of the image. Drawing from other forms of sense experience, primarily touch and kinaesthetic, haptic visuality involves the body more than is the case with optical visuality” (Mark, L. 2000: 163).

⁴ See also Sullivan, S. (2001). *Living Across and Through Skins: Transactional Bodies, Pragmatism, and Feminism*. Blumington, Indiana: University Press. Massumi, B. (2002). *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press. Manning, E. (2009). *Relationships: Movement, Art, Philosophy*. Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press.

viewer will experience the displayed dismembered body differently, as body knowledge and the way of experiencing the senses is always a very subjective experience.



3-1: **Berlinde De Bruyckere**, *The Pillow*, 2010, wax, epoxy, iron, wool, cotton, wood 90 x 70 x 60 cm

Berlinde De Bruyckere's sculpture *The Pillow* (2010) (image 3-1) is a cast of a human body, moulded from wax, tightly embracing a soft fabric cushion and merging into it. Only one of the figure's legs can be seen and the other one has already merged with the soft material. The coming together of the realistic representation of the human form with the spectator's corporeal presence, renders her work not only visual but also positions *The Pillow*, in what Marks calls, "haptic visuality". Haptic means touch and haptic visuality invites the viewer to use vision as though it were the sense of touch (Mark, L. 2000: 2 and 127). Marks proposes a way of looking that involves all the senses. For her, haptic visuality is a multi-sensory bodily experience that "emphasises the viewer's inclination to perceive" (ibid: 162). In this multi-sensory model of perception, the body takes centre stage.

3.1.1 Compassionate Empathy

As will be discussed in chapter five, the representation of the body as fragmented and in a state of transformation, may cause conflicting and abject emotions in the viewer. Indeed, when we are confronted with De Bruyckere's sculptures, we decode them through the knowledge acquired through our own living body. Realising the 'incorrectness' of the representation of distorted bodies, the spectator may experience overwhelming sensations and emotions, which could lead to discomfort and anxiety.

Even though, the artwork will always remain a lifeless object, a mere representation of the body, the question of why some viewers emotionally invest in this type of artwork, seems to be pertinent at this point. This of course, reactivates the debate about the 'im/possibility' of sharing and penetrating somebody else's experiences, especially if the person has a very different background and belongs to a different culture, language, race, or gender. Is it at all possible to experience similar feelings as another person, to identify with the 'other' through empathy? Recent scientific studies seem to contend that there is a convergence of bodily experiences through the senses. New research in cognitive science has detected a combination of neural and social factors that form or influence human thought and understanding.⁵ This type of research has given scientific credibility to visual and media studies postulating that in seeing, embodiment and empathy come together in the perception of artifacts.

Empathy plays an enormous role in the understanding and perception of De Bruyckere's artwork.⁶ It is in particular, the similarity between the 'real' human body and De Bruyckere's sculptures that contributes to the viewers' identification, facilitating the projection of their sense of self.

Griselda Pollock takes on Bracha Ettinger's term 'fascinace', to describe the spectators' emotional investments in memories and traumatic events, which are mediated by artifacts, media or literature, and not experienced personally by the viewer (Pollock, G. 2013a: 35). In a way, 'fascinace' draws attention to a parallel instability of boundaries represented in De Bruyckere's artwork; on one side, the blurring of boundaries between the spectator and the

⁵ For a further discussion see Di Dio C. and Gallese V. (2009). Neuroaesthetics: a 'Review', *Current Opinion in Neurobiology*, 19, p.682-687. Freedberg, D. and Galles, V. (2007). Motion, Emotion and Empathy in Aesthetic Experience. *Trends in Cognitive Science*, 11(5), 197-203.

⁶ De Bruyckere's fragmented figures function simultaneously as 'real' physical objects and as an extension of the imagination. The spectator's perception of the fragmented body may move between her sculptures as being simply objects, and the possibility of them having implicit emotional and existential meaning. This shift in the viewer's perception and the 'ability' of the artwork to ignite this 'transference', is what allows the viewer to experience "emotional content in a lifeless object" (Morrell, M. E. 2010: 41). Essentially, experiencing emotional content in a work of art cannot be separated from this shift of perception.

‘pain of other’, and on the other side, the blurring of boundaries between soft material, branches or animals and the human body. This instability of boundaries, may shift the perception of “what is Me and what is Not-me”, emphasising in this way what Pollock terms “the liquid quality of subjectivity” (Pollock, G. 2013a: 35). In fact, for her, “humanising compassion and responsibility towards the other”, is indispensable in order for aesthetic and ethic to come together in a work of art representing traumatic events (Pollock, G. 2013a: 36).

As Ettinger contends, empathy devoid of compassion can slip into a means to satisfy the narcissistic tendency of the viewer. In differentiating between empathy and compassion, she highlights the superiority of compassion as a term with which to describe the joint involvement of victims and viewers (Pollock, G. 2013a: 35). My aim, therefore, is to explore if and how De Bruyckere’s artwork engages the audience through ‘compassionate empathy’ and succeeds in conveying the suffering of the other.

3.2. Getting in Touch with the World

3.2.1 Realistic Representation

The indexical nature of the casting process, the scale of the body parts and the colour of the wax surface mimicking the skin in *The Pillow* (2010), all serve to enhance the link between the artwork and the spectator. Soft materials belonging to the everyday, like blankets and pillows, as well as display cabinets, tap into the spectators’ memories and experiences of ‘their own everyday’. The pillow, as an everyday object, relates to our own body and may encourage the viewers to place themselves in the skin of the represented body (image 3-1), highlighting the important role of the body in achieving an understanding of oneself, the environment and others.

This realistic representation of the human body through colour and scale connects the artwork to the physical presence of the spectator, pointing to a possible way of making emotional meaning visible through the body⁷. Indeed, the life-sized human figure in this sculpture, combined with every day soft materials, seems to draw even more attention to the particularities of the ‘lived body’.⁸ Referencing the spectator’s lived body, De Bruyckere

⁷ For a discussion on the relationship between physical and emotional or mental pain see the introduction and for a discussion on the representation of physical vs. emotional pain see chapter five and seven.

⁸ The lived-body, in Merleau-Ponty’s *Phenomenology of Perception*, is a body that alongside providing the possibility of movement is aware of the world it inhabits and is a body that reacts in a meaningful way to external stimulations. He sees the lived-body as a hidden lived connection between an intelligent, but pre-reflective body and the world it faces and perceives

brings personal experiences of corporeality into her artwork. As a result, this personal embodied knowledge will impact on the way we perceive the representations of the human body, as we project our personal bodily perspectives and experiences onto it. In *The Pillow* (2010), this awareness allows the spectator to imagine how it might feel to inhabit a body tightly squeezing a soft cushion.

As the body is constantly perceived in both, space and time, the ‘lived body’ plays a fundamental function in the experience of the self and the world (Merleau-Ponty, M. 2012: 91). Merleau-Ponty’s claims that perception involves a lived dynamic between perceptual body and the outside world, such that certain aspects of the world, for example, the softness of the fabric or the imprecise smoothness of the wax in De Bruyckere’s sculptures, are known because they immediately evoke knowledge acquired before. Embodied theory provides, therefore, a ‘model’ whereby the physical and the mental both play a significant role (Merleau-Ponty, M. 2012: 30).

According to Elkins, Merleau-Ponty’s vocabulary lacks specificity in describing the materiality of artworks, he concedes that phenomenology and Merleau-Ponty’s ‘embodied’ theory demonstrating the interconnection of body and consciousness, still remain the starting point for a re-inscription of materiality in art (Elkins, J. 2008: 27-29). Mark Hansen, as well, drawing on Merleau-Ponty’s ontology of the flesh to describe virtual reality, insists that embodied perception and therefore, the process involving the passage from tactile to visual, will always influence every human activity (Hansen, M. 2006: 8-9).

The connection between the body and the senses, and the way in which scholars have rationalised spectators’ perceptions and interactions with art objects has undergone considerable changes over the last twenty years.⁹ Progress in cognitive science and psychology has played a significant role in highlighting the importance of the body in the interactions between spectator and art object. Recent feminist studies in line with the ‘turn to affect’ have reconsidered the hierarchy and functioning of the senses in an art encounter. Moreover, the key role played by somatic reactions in the formation of meaning of artifacts, may be ‘better understood’ if we consider that these works have been created for embodied

through a constant contact with the external world. The basis of this connection between human and world is perception, which in turn is connected to the lived-body (Merleau-Ponty, M. 2012: 148, 75, 92).

⁹ Jay, M. (1993). *Downcast Eyes. The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought*. Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press. Marks, L. U. (2000). *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses*, Durham: Duke University Press. Paterson, M. (2007). *The Senses of Touch: Haptics, Affects and Technologies*, Oxford & New York: Berg. Barker, J. M. (2009). *The Tactile Eye: Touch and the Cinematic Experience*., Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press. Pallasmaa, J. (2011). *The Embodied Image: Imagination and Imagery in Architecture*, Chichester: John Wiley & Sons Ltd to just name but a few.

viewers. In a way, art has always been and will always be an embodied experience, as even the viewing of a virtual art object or the experiencing of a sound installation presupposes an embodied individual.

3.2.2 Embodied Sculpture

Sculptural practice, because of the connection between the hands and the material, has often been associated with the sense of touch. This perceived closeness to touch seems to assign more embodied qualities to sculptural practice than other art forms. Indeed, even the verb itself ‘to embody’ seems to indicate the sculptural process, as its definition is “to give a tangible form to an idea, principles or thoughts”.¹⁰

De Bruyckere trained as a painter and widely uses paintings as a source of inspiration; however, she found the medium inadequate to express her concerns and feelings. As the artist explains:

When I was a painter I was always gluing materials to the paper – the surface of the painting was never sufficient for me. There is no possibility of touch, no softness in the material to give you hope” (De Bruyckere, B. 2012 in Coghlan, A.)

Alex Potts notes that sculpture’s potential for imaginative touch “activate[s] a more directly physical and bodily engaged response from the viewer than a painting” (Potts, A. 2001b: ix). The embodied quality of sculpture, which gives it mass, volume and the ability to overcome the limitations of the two-dimensional, has a long history and has contributed to the extensive dispute between painting and sculpture.¹¹

This connection between sculpture and touch, although it is an essential point of disagreement in the ‘paragone’, has more far reaching implications. To begin with, the experience of sense of touch coming into direct contact with the external object has been considered to be more real, reliable, immediate and unmediated than that with any of the other senses.¹² Additionally, the historical attitude towards touch, with regard to its unmediated status in relation to all the other senses, has been contradictory (Dent, P. 2014: 14).

¹⁰ *English Oxford Dictionary*, available from <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/embody> [Accessed 10.10.2014].

¹¹ During the Renaissance, for instance, in the work of some artists, such as Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio, Nicolò Tribolo and Agnolo Bronzino, the interest in tactility exceeded the interest in representational theme and was intended to be a contribution to the debate on the relative stature of painting versus sculpture (Johnson, G.A. 2014: 91).

¹² The Evangelist Thomas asks to touch the wound in order to believe in Jesus’ resurrection: “Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe” (John 20:25, New Revised Standard Version).

The privileging of sight over the other senses may be retraced back to Plato through the presumed connection of vision to reason and thought. Indeed, the sense of sight, with its direct link to light, seems to offer a direct link to knowledge, as expressions like: to have a vision, to have insight, to be enlightened or simply to see, indicate the act of understanding.

The valorisation of vision and hearing was also due to the possibility of them controlling and transcending the body. The body, deemed more primitive, was the site of the ‘contact senses’, which were considered to be distant and separate from rational thought (Blackman, L. 2008: 85, Marks, L. U. 2013: 144; Papenburg, B. 2013: 159).¹³

Recent psychological and philosophical studies seem to disagree on the total number of senses a human being possesses, their rank and their interconnectedness. Some scholars even argue that human beings may have an infinite number of senses working together (Duncum, P. 2012).¹⁴

Culturally, the sense of touch has been endowed with ‘transgressiveness’, as from an early age; children are allowed to look but not to touch, going against their intrinsic compulsion to explore the world through touch and taste. Touching is often endowed with possible dangerous physical, unmediated and sexual properties, which may foster a link to disease, germs, sin, vice and perversion.

These contradictions and inconsistencies in the way we understand the senses and their roles in our lives, can also be observed in the fact that the sense of touch, although considered a contact sense and, therefore a secondary sense, seems to be the one invested with more emotional significance. Touch, through its ability to engage emotional reactions, is believed to have played an essential role in the intellectual development of the human race. As Aristotle claimed, touch, the most “human sense”, is the one that separates humans from animals (Gallace, A. and Spence, C. 2014: 107-109).

A more synesthetic approach would also inevitably increase touch’s standing among the other senses. The sense of touch could then be viewed as a basic sense upon which all other senses may be dependent, through physical contact (taste) and physiological processes (taste,

¹³ In Western philosophy knowledge was separated from the senses, even though this knowledge may have been gathered through the senses. Philosophers, such as Kant and Hegel believed that only distant senses (vision and hearing) were invested with the possibility of aesthetic experiences. For Hegel, for instance, “aesthetic is a transcendent rise from a sensuous particular to a universal truth, and was only possible through the distance senses” (Marks, L.U. 2013: 145).

¹⁴ Nonetheless, today the senses are still taught as being separate entities, demonstrating that the supremacy of vision is still perpetuated to the present day. The way the senses are taught still assumes the Cartesian dualism, where mind and body are considered as two separate entities, with the mind being the only path to true knowledge, doing all the logical thinking, and the body, reduced to its physiological processes that are controlled by the mind. In this binary system the importance of an individual sense is determined by its perceived relationship to the mind.

hear). Vision too, has been rationalised as an extension of touch (Descartes, R. 2001: 67). Moreover, to ‘be touched by’ an artwork can also mean to feel, in this way linking touch to expressions of emotional states of sympathy / empathy. This ‘bi-directional’ haptic quality of sculpture, originates from the fact that we can physically touch the object and we are ‘touched’ by the object at the same time (Paterson, M. 2007: 94). It is this ‘being touched by’, this more abstract form of touching, rather than the physical manifestation of touch in sculptural practice that may contribute to the discussion of De Bruyckere’s sculptures. Gottfried Herder, for instance, already highlighted in 1778 the direct link between sculpture and the sense of touch, arguing that the spectator employs the imaginative touch rather than the physical touch when confronted with a three dimensional work (Zuckert, R. 2009: 285, 287).

However, this synesthetic perception of artwork must be as old as art itself, so it seems appropriate to ask what might have driven the interpretative framework to move from a mostly visual to a more synesthetic approach to art. In fact, although the legacy of modernism, with its emphasis on the visual, may still influence art criticism, there has been a noticeable shift in visual studies, where more attention is devoted to the embodied experience generated by an artwork. In recent studies, the importance of experiencing art, through the totality of the senses has been repeatedly emphasised. Writers in different fields have outlined the importance of senses close to the body such as touch, smell and taste in the formation of knowledge, positioning them as communicable and sharable and therefore, as “agents of aesthetic and ethic” (Marks, L. U. 2013: 145-147).

By setting up relations between the object and the space in which it has been directly placed, between presence and absence and between inside and outside, De Bruyckere’s work takes advantage of the embodied connection between art object, body and senses. Her sculptures mobilise several senses rather than the disembodied gaze and can be seen as accentuating this difference between a vision-centred perception of the artwork and a body-centred one.

In sculptures of flayed bodies, as in *The Pillow* (2010) (image 3-1), or *Liggende I and Liggende II* (image 5-3 and 5-4), the spectators’ sensorial experience is activated through the use of the casting process that represents very accurately the ‘lived body’, and through exploiting the acquired knowledge of tactile materials like fabric and wax. Acknowledging the role played by a combination of several senses when confronted with De Bruyckere’s work, shifting from optical visibility to a more synesthetic experience of it, changes the mode in which the relationship between viewer and artwork is understood. As will be discussed in

chapter five, in a purely visual model the connection between spectator and artwork is more likely to be one of mastery, as the viewers can separate themselves from the object in order to rationalise the representation. Recognising the importance of all the senses in the perception and interpretation of De Bruyckere's artwork, the separation between the spectator's perception and the artwork becomes more difficult. Indeed, the knowledge obtained through the haptic cannot be obtained through a mere scientific, detached and rational gaze, but is based on a close, sensual bodily connection with the represented object. As Marks points out, in a more embodied visuality the relationship between viewer and artwork is one of mutuality. For her, "haptic visuality" makes the spectators more vulnerable and open to the artwork "reversing the relation of mastery that characterises optical viewing" (Marks, L. 2000: 184-185). The spectator, in order to achieve an embodied understanding, has to give in to the work of art and, for an instant, become part of it.

Acknowledging the importance of the close senses in the 'understanding' of De Bruyckere's work, may place similar emphasis on both the shared and the personal knowledge, which may cause a certain loss of 'objectivity', but on the other hand, will enrich the "shared experienced that is art" (Korsmeyer, C. 1999: 94-98). This fact may open the possibility of sharing experiences and emotions, even though elements of the artwork will always remain individual and difficult to communicate.

This propensity of De Bruyckere's fragmented figures to mobilise several senses, seems to capitalise on the 'first impact' of the work, before the spectator's symbolic understanding of it really begins. During this 'pre-conceptual' phase, affect is present as an ambiguous force. Affect is the energy of the in-between and, although it may be felt immediately, its meaning often escapes 'signification'. In fact, Best observes that on the affective level an artwork can be felt quickly, even though its meaning may escape the viewer (Best, S. 2014: 7). One could argue that, there is a sense of immediacy during the first few moments in which viewers begin to take in De Bruyckere's artwork. This physical, sensorial, and often emotional engagement, which may temporarily precede the conceptual understanding of the artwork, creates 'immediate sensations' in the spectators that involves 'the haptic' and with it, the role played by our skin. If experiencing an artwork in a haptic way involves all the senses, then the act of looking also becomes an experience of imaginative touching (Sobchack, V. 2004: 67-70). The sense of touch, even if just imaginative, is always connected to our skin.

The skin, the delicate membrane, which separates our insides from the outside, is often thought of as the location of subjectivity formation, as it is where the first experiences of the

world are shaped. Playing an important part in the perception of pleasure and pain, the skin is also understood as the surface on which much of human suffering is felt. Indeed, Tomkins points out how torture and sexual seduction play out on the surface of the body (Tomkins, S. 2009: 190). In De Bruyckere's fragmented bodies, then, the flayed skin may be seen to relate metaphorically to the capacity for empathy, for suffering with someone and for being inside their skin, the place where feelings are sensed through touch.

Didier Anzieu stresses the importance of skin as a sense organ, because we can survive without the other senses, but we can't survive without skin. For him, the skin is also "the basis for ... the exchange of signals with other people" and therefore functions as a boundary between the inside and outside and between the body and psyche hence making it the interface, the main place of contact between the self and other (Anzieu, D. 2016: 16). As an instrument of communication, the skin lets us sense and feel the world. His discussion of touch, through the concept of skin Ego, which assumes a biological basis for the development of an independent, healthy psyche, accentuates this relationship and the entanglement between the psyche, the body and the world (Anzieu, D. 2016: 16-17).

However, one should not reduce the spectator's responses to De Bruyckere's fragmented figures exclusively to the immediate physical and sensorial effects, as her intriguing artworks always invite viewers to form interpretations through a cultural and intellectual process as well. Although the interaction between the spectator's body and the environment definitely plays a defining role in experiencing art, the definition of the body as exclusively sensory may be problematic, as the perception of artwork depends on the convergence of emotions, memories and knowledge (Minisale, G. 2013: 183). For this reason, De Bruyckere's artwork should be seen as both conceptual and embodied; art that is capable of setting in motion the spectators' senses, emotions and reason. The integration of different ways of knowing is a defining characteristic of De Bruyckere's artwork that contributes to the intensity of the aesthetic experience.

3.2.3 The Smothering Mother

The contrast of the fleshy wax mimicking the skin, with the soft, white material of the cushions, heightens the vulnerability of the body in image 3-1, exposing its nakedness and frailty. What may make this sculpture attractive but 'shocking' at the same time is the tender but tense embrace, which may suggest emotional distress or wounded flesh inhabiting the

liminal space between life and death. However, this painful image softens into a lovers' embrace. The tactile physical connection between body and pillow 'emanates' a comforting tenderness, a desire of protection that may remind the spectator of an embrace of a fellow human. "...it's not the pillow as a monster, it's the pillow as a lover" (De Bruyckere, B. 2012 in ACCA), and as the artist confesses, she "always feels the need to comfort" with her work, which may seem surprising given much of the imagery (Berlinde De Bruyckere in Theys, H. 2011: 27).

The casting process used in *The Pillow* (2010), recreates a naturalistic looking human body with a skin-like surface, which may help to convey how it feels to inhabit this wounded and vulnerable body. While the perceived softness of the pillow comforts and protects, providing hope for the figure, the 'death-like' colour of the skin and the muscular tension in the body, seems to indicate a desire to retreat from the world. Indeed, the figure seems to be overwhelmed by the pillow into which it curls. The pillow both supports and smothers the figure simultaneously.

To 'smother' means "to kill (someone) by covering their nose and mouth so that they suffocate or to stifle, asphyxiate, choke, throttle, strangle and strangulate".¹⁵ In English, however, the sound of the word inevitably indicates the mother's role in the infant's life.¹⁶ The suffocating and over protective mother, similar to the pillow in this sculpture, does not respect her child's physical and mental boundaries. The smothering mother's need for excessive closeness makes her unable to protect her child without suffocating him / her (Ashner, L. 1997: 103).

The foetal position of the body in this sculpture also points to a time before the separation between mother and infant. A time, as explained in the chapters two and five, before the child accepts language and with it the law of the father. The figure in *The Pillow* (2010), as with most protagonists in De Bruyckere's sculptures, is captured in a state of transition and seems to struggle with the boundaries between Me and Not-Me, before and now, inside and outside; pointing to the fact that the sensing body is not a closed entity but is in a continuous state of exchange with the outside and with other human beings.

Caught in this process of transformation, *The Pillow* (2010) may refer to both the desire to

¹⁵ English Oxford Dictionaries. Available from <http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/smother> [Accessed 23.01.2015].

¹⁶ See Warwick, J. (2012). Smothering: The silent Abuse. *BACP Children & Young People*. Available from <http://www.rediscoverthemagic.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/Smothering-article.pdf> [Accessed 07.10.2014].

reunite with the mother and the desire to separate from her. It points to the re-enactment of this early fantasy, the 'figure-child' is still connected to and shares 'skin' with the 'pillow-mother'. As in Anzieu's notion of a skin ego, the baby's first recognition of the mother is not visual but is felt through the skin as the child connects with her through skin contact.¹⁷ At the beginning the child shares the skin with the mother forming a single, perfect surface (Coco, J. 2004: 105).

Similar to the mythological Dionysius in Irigaray's *Marine Lover of Friedrich Nietzsche, The Pillow* (2010), is a human hybrid, formed of two different entities: body and soft material. The 'man-pillow' lacks boundaries and, therefore, skin. Dionysius, the offspring of Zeus and the human Semele, is a hybrid, half God and half human.¹⁸ In Irigaray's narrative, Dionysius was delivered twice. The first time he was removed prematurely from his mother and the second time from Zeus' leg, where he was sewn in to complete 'his gestation'. In this formulation of the story, Dionysius lacks "a tactile anchoring", as he was not delivered by a woman and was denied the mother's touch (Krier T. and Harey, E 2004: 8). For Irigaray, subjectivity's formation and the mother's touch always involve the skin. There is a similarity between Anzieu's skin-ego, which is defined as a 'containing envelope', like a kind of protective barrier and filter of exchanges, and the skin described as the locus of boundaries and identity formation by Irigaray. As Irigaray remarks:

Deliverance by a woman in labour is a thing unknown to this hybrid infant. Unknown the passage out of her womb. And the doubling of their bodies, the difference in their boundaries - the coming into appearance in one's own skin" (Irigaray, L. 1991: 123).

This interconnection between body and soft material in *The Pillow* (image 3-1), reinforces this Me / Not-Me dichotomy, as the pillow can be considered a 'transitional' object. Soft materials, such as soft toys, blankets and pillows, often trigger connections to childhood memories; memories of transition, separation and loss. Psychoanalyst D. W. Winnicott, before Anzieu, recognises the significance of the mother in the child's early life and introduces a transitional space that is formed in the process of separation between mother and child. Transitional objects, such as soft toys and blankets, which the child recognises as 'Not-Me', populate this

¹⁷ The child's first tactile recognition with the mother is through the skin, however the child first recognises the mother through her voice and heart beat and therefore through sound.

¹⁸ Nymphs raised him, because his mother perished after her desire to meet the God-Zeus was granted. Zeus appeared to her in the form of thunder and lightning. Semele unable to withstand the God's power gave birth to Dionysius prematurely and died (Talbert, C: 2006: 80).

space (Winnicott, D. W. 1987: 55). De Bruyckere's act of sewing the pillow and body together may place the figure in the sculpture *The Pillow*, in this transitional zone, continuously re-enacting the anxiety of the formation of boundaries between the mother and the child, and between inner psychic reality and the external world. Moreover, interpreting the pillow as a replacement for the mother, the sculpture reminds viewers once more of the theme of the dead son on the lap of the mother, connecting this sculpture with the representation of the 'Pietà' discussed in the previous chapter.

3.3 The Logic of Matter

The 'shift from opticality to embodied seeing', discussed above, is far from being an accepted and well-established process. For Elkins, there is a tangible 'fear of materiality' in art history and visual studies. In fact, it seems that the increased interest in the materiality of the artwork is always hampered by the need to keep it abstract (Elkins, J. 2008: 26). However, Barbara Bolt disputes this 'fear of materiality' and claims a renewed interest in materiality at the beginning of the twenty-first century as the point at which different field of studies converge to emphasise the need to rethink the relationship between subject and object.

What role does this greater attention to the materiality of the art object play in the investigation and understanding of Berlinde De Bruyckere's fragmented figures? How does this materiality relate to affect, and to the way the viewers bodily perceive De Bruyckere's fragmented figures?

The artist employs several materials to create her sculptures, however, in this section I will discuss her extensive use of fabric and wax and the significance of their historical and cultural background in conveying the notion of corporeality and enhancing haptic appreciation.

Sculptural technique and the materials in Berlinde De Bruyckere's sculptures, merge to convey and emphasise body fragmentation. Indeed, materials such as wax, for instance, are often not only deployed for their aesthetic qualities but also for their ability to signify. The inquiry into the materiality of De Bruyckere's artwork, for instance, raises questions about the ephemerality, highlighting how the fragility and impermanence of wax and the indexical nature of casting, becomes a signifier of impermanence and loss. The materials in her sculptures, however, could also be described as encompassing contradicting qualities and may be interpreted as both permanent and temporary. They are permanent, because both wax and fabric, in an ideal environment, can be kept for centuries. Temporary, because even under the

most ideal conditions, over time the artworks will change, the colours will fade and eventually they will start to degrade.

De Bruyckere describes this interaction between material and fragmentation, as an on-going dialogue between herself and the materials, which may even become visible in the sculpture and help convey how subjectivity, rather than being a static entity, is constantly shifting and being repositioned (Coghlan, A. 2012). Materiality in De Bruyckere's sculptures, therefore, contributes to positioning subjectivity on incessantly changing contexts. Subject matter, materiality, casting technique and display mode all help to convey and situate subjectivity not as stable but as multiplicitous and fluid. Additionally, as De Bruyckere's artworks move between cultures, as her exhibitions are shown in different countries and contexts, the symbolic meaning of materials—whether wax, fabric, plaster, hair, or everyday objects—can shift, taking on new meanings and thereby accumulating additional layers of interpretation.

3.3.1 Fabric: Visible Memories

Referring to the 'lived' body through form and the casting process, the artist uses the 'familiar' and recognisable human form to produce an 'unfamiliar' fragmented and distorted object. De Bruyckere's sculptures inhabit the realm of the unstable and precarious, a place in which the body is in a constant state of change and disintegration. As will be examined in more detail in chapter five, the spectator may simultaneously experience diverse feelings which stem from the strong instinctive reactions of being confronted with realistic death-like fragmented figures that threaten bodily boundaries. Yet the introduction of familiar and everyday household objects in her installations, such as blankets, pillows, stools and display cabinets, seems to soften the violence intrinsic in the martyred bodies and engages the spectators at a much more individual level, tapping into their personal embodied and 'tacit' knowledge. The softness of the blankets and pillows in De Bruyckere's sculptures, are essential in order to "temper the violence of the artist's work" (Goghlan, E. 2012). This connection between her artworks and the spectators' everyday objects and practices exploits the aesthetic of everyday perception and succeeds in creating an aesthetic continuum between art and life. As the artist indicates, the incorporation of fabric and cushions in her figures highlights the human like aspect of her artifacts.

If you look at the wax pieces, they are all very fragile. I put cushions in the pieces to protect them because they are so fragile. They become more human because I use the same colour as the skin of my human figures. Just to pay attention to the fragility, I use the cushions. The cushions come from our own history. We use blankets on the bed so they become part of us in our lives (De Bruyckere, B. 2013 in Zhao, S.).

The cushions in *The Pillow* (image 3-1), instead of functioning merely as a soft layer between the skin and the hard wooden surface of the stool, have become part of the figure. The incompleteness of the body is balanced and alleviated by the presence of the pillows, which may be seen as extending their role beyond mere protective covering. In this sculpture, the soft material, which is sewn into the body, becomes both extraneous to and part of the figures, simultaneously restricting and protecting the body. Indeed, the soft layer taking over the role of the skin may even be invested with the ability to sense, opening up the possibility of a different type of bodily knowing. The soft inorganic material, like the human skin, provides a site where there is a continual exchange and interchange between what we might understand to be the inside and the outside. The very fact that the pillow simultaneously displays internal and external qualities and takes on the role of ‘membrane’, like the human skin, may raise several questions.

In many of De Bruyckere’s figures, such as *The Pillow* (2010), this distinction between the animate (body) and the inanimate (pillow), seems to disappear. Indeed, the fact that two different materials play the role of the skin creates ‘confusion’ between the animate and inanimate and disrupts the accepted physiological tradition of the permanent and inorganic, in contrast to the transitory fleshy parts of the body; the parts that are malleable, changeable and fluid.

3.3.1.1 Memory of Touch

As argued at the beginning of this chapter, senses such as touch, smell and taste have been defined through their apparent closeness to the body and their tendency to escape the verbal and visual register. Although tactility as a form of knowledge has been criticised for its lack of distance (Marks, L. 2000: 133), when rationalised through the concept of haptic memory, it can be projected into distance, even if just mentally.

David Howes for instance, uses the notion of touch as a different type of bodily knowing through the concept of ‘skin knowledge’. He posits that the body has a kind of intelligence

that cannot be expressed through language or thoughts, but is rather felt and sensed (Howes, D. 2005: 27). This ‘body intelligence’ gained through the ‘close senses’, may well elude the purely visual but the fact that it is based on personal memories, imbues it with the potential to open up different perspectives in the perception of De Bruyckere’s artwork, adding an individual layer of interpretation.

An important part of the knowledge we have about the world we inhabit can be described as physically acquired through bodily experiences. This gathered knowledge is what enables us to know how a piece of fabric may feel without touching it or to imagine the taste of a piece of metal without putting it in our mouth. This knowledge, this wordless communication, must be stored in our memory and we know that at some point we must have touched a similar fabric or tasted metal, but we cannot necessarily retrace the steps of this acquired information. Michael Polanyi redefines human knowledge and postulates that “we can know more than we can tell” (Polanyi, M. 1966: 4). For him, all knowledge has an embodied personal and tacit dimension to it that cannot be easily communicated through words or symbols alone (Polanyi, M. 1966: 24-25).¹⁹ This tacit knowledge plays an important role in shaping the way we perceive artwork. Through embodying sensory information, we can feel, taste and smell the objects we encounter without physically touching, smelling or tasting them. Indeed, tacit knowledge may help the viewer make sense of the texture of fabric and skin in De Bruyckere’s *The Pillow* (2010), as tactile - in some way feeling the soft quality of the pillows and the smooth but broken texture of the skin.

Fabric as a medium may definitely be positioned in the category of the ‘tacit dimension’, as it enters our life just few moments after we are born. The newborn baby is first wrapped in a warm blanket before being clothed for the first time. This tacit dimension of fabric, the memory of its touch and the sensory stimulation it provides, is essential to the visual decoding of De Bruyckere’s work. Marshall McLuhan, for instance, describes clothing as an extension of our skin, what could also be interpreted as an extension of self (McLuhan, M: 1994: 123-4).

Fabric and pillows may also refer to the ‘lived body’ through their ability to retain for a short while the warmth, shape and smell of the body. The shape left by the head on the pillow, like a negative mould, stands in for the body that was there but is no longer. The memory of

¹⁹ The term tacit knowledge has its origin in works on the philosophy of science (Polanyi, 1966), ecological psychology (Neisser, 1976), and organisational behaviour (Schön, 1983). The term is often used in contrast to ‘explicit knowledge’, which is knowledge available to everybody. Tacit knowledge instead, although present in the individual, is not yet consciously known. It has also been argued that tacit knowledge plays an essential part in the creation of new knowledge (Sternberg, R. and Horvath, A. 1999: 44; Kikoski, C and Kikoski, J: 2004: xii).

this absent body, left on the pillow, is reinforced by the fact that scent and warmth linger on the fabric long after the person has gone. Even though short lived, this ‘indexical’ connection between body and fabric can raise powerful emotions, especially when the fabric functions as a relic, as a reminder of the person that has come in close physical contact with it. Garments that have belonged to a missing or dead person can become wearable emotional memories.

3.3.2 The Fabric of a ‘Material History’: Wax a Reperception?

The preceding section has established the importance of the sense of touch (haptic visuality), and implicit knowledge in the perception and understanding of De Bruyckere’s artwork and how fabrics as materials, play a central role in the process of tactile perception. It has also been highlighted that in several of De Bruyckere’s figures, as in *The Pillow* (2010) (image 3-1), fabric assumes the double function of protection layer and skin-replacement. In the next section, I will discuss materials that have often been described as skin-like or possessing skin like qualities. Describing Bourgeois 1960’s artwork in latex for instance, Briony Fer points out how some materials have the ability to make the transition between material and skin believable (Fer, B.1999: 32). Leah Stoddard too, recognises the primordial, skin-like qualities of wax and its ability “to evoke many things at once: sensations, emotions, memories, history, the passage of time” (Stavitsky, G. 1999).

Asked if the historical connotation of wax plays an important role in her work, De Bruyckere replied that she uses wax mainly because of its malleability and the ease with which a realistically shaped body can be formed (Kulturfolger. 2011)²⁰. However, as ‘every perception is always a reperception’, we may disagree with the artist’s intentionality and argue that the history of wax and its previous practices may play an important role, at least for viewers, in the perception of her artwork. Indeed, sensations or affects are seldom perceived in isolation or as new elements, which points to the fact that knowledge always has to be regarded as layered and accumulated.

Wax is indeed a very pliable medium that allows the artist to overcome limits encountered in drawing and painting, however, depending on the viewer’s background and knowledge, wax may also take on different connotations. When confronted with De Bruyckere’s wax

²⁰ Kulturfolger: „Wachs wird seit jeher benutzt, um Totenmasken zu fertigen, weswegen es mit dem Tod assoziiert wird. Hat dieser Hintergrund Ihre Arbeit beeinflusst?“ Berlinde De Bruyckere: „Nicht wirklich. Ich arbeite hauptsächlich mit Wachs, weil es ein sehr flexibles Material ist und sehr leicht zu manipulieren. So kann ich Skulpturen erschaffen, die perfekte und realistisch geformte Körper haben, so wie ich es wil“. Kulturfolger. (2011). Inspiriert vom Leben. Interview mit Berlinde De Bruyckere. Available from http://www.kulturfolger.de/index.php?id=berlinde_de_bruyckere [Accessed 01.12.2014].

figures, for instance, spectators may be reminded of the extensive use of wax in producing religious ex-votos, reliquaries, death masks and anatomical waxes. This long history of wax as material and its many uses may indeed influence the way De Bruckere's sculptures are perceived.

Wax, with its translucent qualities and its ephemerality, and its ability to mimic both flesh and skin, outside and inside of the human body, points to the inevitable transformation of the lived body. From life to death and thereafter, wax can be employed to represent the different stages of the 'human life cycle'. This ability of coloured wax to realistically reproduce flesh, skin and bones, as well as represent the different stages of bodily transformation from life to putrefaction, has been widely exploited in order to produce anatomical models.²¹

Despite the fact that wax has been used for thousands of years to produce objects, wax as art material has largely been banished to the "margin of art history" (Panzanelli, R. 2008: 1). In fact, wax as artistic material almost entirely disappeared in the nineteenth century.

Although still being widely used to create anatomical models of body parts for studying the human body, waxworks displayed in museums representing historical situations or famous people, and religious ex votos, wax as material for the end product of art was excluded from the established Western art history (Ballestriero, R. 2009; Kelley, M. 2004b).²²

Contemporary sculptors²³ striving to reproduce human skin as realistically as possible tend to take advantage of the many material and technical innovations and prefer to use fiberglass, silicone, rubber or resin. The advent of the 3D printer has also transformed the artistic / creative process, allowing artists like Rachel Lee Hovnanian, to create hyper-realist sculptures of the human body.

In her exhibition: *Perfect Baby Showroom* (2016), Hovnanian uses 3D printing technology to create a multitude of perfect babies. Genetically perfect babies, like the ones in image 3-2, may even be available to order in the not so distant future. As the artist predicts, "It seems so far-fetched, ordering a baby, but I've talked to a lot of doctors and researchers, and it's here" (McCarthy, L. 2014).

²¹ For a discussion of the use of wax in producing anatomical waxes see Panzanelli, R. and Ritter von Schlosser, J. (2008). *Ephemeral Bodies: Wax Sculpture and the Human Figure*. Los Angeles: Getty Publications. Cattaneo, L. and Riva, A. (1993). *Le cere anatomiche di Clemente Susini dell'Università di Cagliari*. Cagliari: STEF.

²² The donation of artifacts to a deity to make a request or to thank for a received grace has its origin in pre-Christian beliefs. Archeologists traced back the ex-voto tradition to pagan civilisations pre-dating that of the Greek and Romans (Dubisch, J. and Winkelman, M. 2005: 50; Ballestriero, R. 2009). Although wax anatomical ex-votos and body parts were used in different religions, they played a particularly important role in the formation of visual sensibility in Italy. (Holmes, M. in Cole, M and Zorach, R. 2009: 160-161).

²³ Evan Penny, Ron Mueck, Duane Hanson, Adam Beane, and Sam Jinks, to name but a few



Image 3-2: **Rachel Lee Hovnanian**, *Perfect Baby Showroom*, 2016, 3D printing

Some contemporary artists, however, still favour wax as a material with which to create sculptures representing the human body, or objects that refer to the body. Artists, such as Kiki Smith (1954-), Rona Pondick (1952-), Robert Gober (1954-), Maurizio Cattelan (1960-), John Isaacs (1968-), Eleanor Crook and Wendy Mayer (1975-), use wax to produce bodies or body parts. What makes wax extremely useful in representing both the outside and inside of the human body, is the ease with which it can be coloured and combined with other materials and even real body parts like hair, teeth and nails (Ballestriero, R. 2009). Additionally, wax as an aesthetic material is not only defined by its malleability and its uncanny ability to mimic human skin, but also by its long history.

Furthermore, the use of temporary materials, like wax, which challenges the idea of enduring works of art, may change the way spectators relate to the work. Confronted with these 'realistic' representations of the human body, spectators may experience a range of contrasting sensations; wax being so fragile and transient encompasses the concepts of the passing of time and transformation. As will be discussed in chapter five, De Bruyckere's figures often appear to be caught in a state of metamorphosis, a transformational passing through or an in-between stage. The materiality of wax, with its temporality and instability, reinforces the feeling of transience communicated through form.

De Bruyckere started using coloured wax as material in 1999 in *Sprekken* (1999) (image 3-3). Her aim was to produce realistic legs, as blankets covered the rest of the body. As a filling material for the sculptures she used epoxy reinforced with a metal structure, wax alone would have been too fragile (Kulturfolger: 2011). The artist explains:

My figures are also vulnerable in their material manifestation. On account of their monumentality and dimensions, they may sometimes seem invincible but, on closer inspection, they turn out to be made of very breakable materials, or to be perishable installations. That makes them very delicate and fragile, easily brushed away or smashed to pieces. They are provocative and vulnerable at the same time (De Bruyckere, B. 2006).



Image 3-3: **Berlinde De Bruyckere**. *Sprekken*, 1999, wax, blankets, polyester, iron
200 x 140 x 180 cm

To create her realistic figures, the artist uses fifteen to twenty different layers of wax with a process that she describes as an ‘upside down’ version of water colour. In fact, she acknowledges that for most artists, it is the opposite, “if you are working in stone one wrong cut can force you to start all over again. But wax is like clay – it’s a process of cooperation, an ongoing dialogue between artist and material” (De Bruyckere, B. in Coghlan, A. 2012).

To render the translucent appearance of the skin, she paints every layer of wax with different colours, starting with pink and yellow, then green, blue and red. In the final sculpture, the colours melt together to form the skin surface. Where she decides to position a shadow or a vein, she has to keep the layering of wax much thinner in order to let the blue layer appear visible through all the previous layers of coloured wax. This layering of different colours and the change in thickness of the wax is what achieves the perfect imitation of skin

tone. The first coat of wax and colour that she applies to the mould will be the surface (De Bruyckere, B. 2012 in ACCA). De Bruyckere considers her works “half painting and half sculpture”; in order to perfect the rendition of the transparency and translucency of the skin, she carefully studied the skin of naked figures in the paintings of old masters, such as Lucas Cranach and Caravaggio (Burley, I. 2012).

Even the perception of the skin colour in De Bruyckere’s sculptures, is never experienced as an isolated sensation, unconnected to the bearer of that colour. The colour has meaning only if it is the colour of something. In fact, it would be difficult to describe the colour of skin and flesh of De Bruyckere’s figures, without mentioning that they are made of wax, and without implying in the skin colour has a certain tactile value. So, we may conclude that, even the skin colour in De Bruyckere’s wax human figures may convey a certain tactile experience.

Although the link between vision and smell seem questionable when discussing sculpture, the content, form and materiality in De Bruyckere’s sculptures may even connect sight to smell through the spectator’s personal memories. Form and material of these suffering bodies, discussed in chapter four and six, such as *Schmerzensmann* (2006), *Jelle Luiwaard* (2004-2005) or *Pietà* (2007-2008), connect my visual experience to particular childhood memories, pointing to the work’s ability to stimulate my senses’ memory. Visually reminiscent of the images of the battered and contorted bodies of Christ or the Saints that were seen and internalised during interminable masses in the Catholic Church, her work awakes the olfactory memory of incense mixed with burned wax, together with the echoing whispers of churchgoers. The memory of the smell of wax as part of a religious activity seems to be a common experience. Indeed, olfactory memories are particularly present during childhood, and Anzieu, with his concept of the ‘envelope of smell’ as a sensory container, recognises the essential role of this sense in the formation of subjectivity (Sidoli, M. 2000: 68). Furthermore, the memory of smells shows how every new perception is never independent from the memory of earlier sensory perceptions. As Seremetakis suggests:

There is no such thing as one moment of perception and then another of memory, representation or objectification. Mnemonic processes are intertwined with the sensory order in such a manner as to render each perception a re-perception (Seremetakis, N. 1994: 9).

Moreover, the way in which we perceive the materiality of wax is not only influenced by its long history as a religious, anatomical and everyday material, but it is also reinforced by the way that other contemporary artists often reference its history or previous use, in their

artworks. John Isaacs' sculptures of the body and body parts, for example, similar to those of De Bruyckere, are cast from the body and moulded in wax.



3-4: **John Isaacs**, *Thinking About It*, 2002, wax, wire, plaster

Taking advantage of the ability of wax to reproduce perfectly both skin and flesh, Isaacs (1968-) produced a self-portrait entitled, *Thinking About It* (2002) (Bozzini, D. 2012). This representation offers a different concept of wax than the ex-votos. The head has been sliced into two both along the surface of the skin and into the depth of the muscle. The cut seems fresh and the exposed muscles seem to be still pulsating with a noticeable amount of fresh blood, as if the skinning happened just before the viewer's arrival. As it is clearly visible in image 3-4, the cut, although 'clinically precise', does not divide the face and head symmetrically but leaves eyes, nose mouth and both ears intact. It is almost as if the sculptor wants us to recognise the subject being represented and to engage with him. Shape, positioning of the cut through skin and muscle, as well as the placement of the head on the table, refer to the historical anatomical wax of Gaetano Giulio Zumbo (1656-1701). Indeed, Isaacs found inspiration in the seventeenth century anatomical waxes of 'The Museo La

Specola', in Florence and Padua, during his research visit (Kemp, M and Wallace, M. 2000: 164).



3-5: Gaetano Giulio Zumbo, *Anatomia di testa maschile*, 1656-1701,

Similar to Isaacs's sculpture, Zumbo's wax head (image 3-5) rests on a table. The incision slices the face diagonally, leaving all defining features intact.

As in Isaac's head (image 3-4), this division separates the inside from the outside, in an attempt to discover the underneath, the inside or maybe the essence of this subject. The strategy of peeling away the surface to see the inside was, of course, used in anatomical imagery and invariably returns the body to some notion of a static essence. Zumbo's wax sculpture (image 3-5) seems to be fixed in the moment before putrefaction takes its course. Although both sculptors, Isaacs and Zumbo, draw on the ability of wax to mimic skin and flesh, Isaacs' approach seems to diverge from the historical anatomical waxes in which bodily fluids and blood were mostly omitted in order to represent an idealised body (Mey, K. 2007: 84).

Isaacs' application of the concept of anatomy can be seen as illustrative of the "Western human thought and activity", which believes that in "the peeling away of covering layers", lays the possibility of discovering the 'inner working'. The artist, using techniques used by anatomists, attempts to produce and draw attention to fragments of realities. The spectator, presented with these fragments of the world, has the opportunity to re-contextualise and re-assemble them into a personal 'whole' (Kemp, M and Wallace, M. 2000: 158). As Isaacs explains:

A bloody flayed figure could represent not the actual horror of corrupted flesh but our attitude towards the body, towards anatomy, to the re-emotionalise the landscape to which the map is already drawn, full of love and hate, and of course borders (Bozzini, D. 2013).

Similarly, in De Bruyckere's figures, with her careful attention to tactile surfaces and textures, the body is caught in a moment of vulnerability and its flayed epidermic covering may highlight the double possibility of searching 'beneath the surface', but also lingering on the skin to communicate our attitude towards passion, trauma, loneliness, memory and even war. De Bruyckere's faceless sculptures have to communicate, through their flayed bodies, emotions that are normally read on facial expressions. Bodily communication may encourage viewers to search beneath the surface, where body language and tactile language meet to convey emotions.

The eighteenth century Vanitas, exhibited at the Welcome collection (image 3-6), offers a different concept of wax to both ex-voto offerings and those of Isaac (image 3-4) and Zumbo's (image 3-5). Similar to the previous sculptures, the wax bust of the woman has been sliced in two, both along the surface and into the depth. However, the incision precisely divides the head into two identical parts. The division is so precise and symmetrical that even the hands seem to inhabit different worlds. One is fleshy and still has a healthy skin colour, the other already belongs to death and only the bones are visible.



3-6: Wax model of a female head. Possibly 18th Century
Welcome Collection

This division separates the inside from the outside, which are shown to be diametrically opposed. Decay and putrefaction is in progress from the interior, even if the exterior keeps the appearance of youth and beauty. The use of wax as sculptural material, allows the positioning of the head (image 3-6), to represent both states of life and death (Hallam, E. 2001: 65). The sculptor here too, draws on the ability of wax to mimic flesh, skin, and bones. The material in this sculpture not only has to represent inside and outside simultaneously, but also has to represent two different physical stages which normally occur at different times. In this case, wax represents both the real and the ideal. Wax has to fulfil the double function of representing the idealised outside, the inanimate and static, as well as decomposition, what is changing and organic. As Elizabeth Hallam explains, science, with its anatomical investigations, adopted the memento mori and funerary sculpture's visual codes that are characteristic of the sixteenth and seventeenth century still life paintings. The female wax figure in (image 3-6) is constructed on binary opposites such as life and death, preservation and decay, where the reality of the human condition and the reality of the body is conveyed through the visibility of the bones and the presence of spiders and maggots. For Hallam, the representation of decay and the inscription "Vanitas Vanitatum et omnia Vanitas Ecc: Chap 1 V 2", clearly position this bust (image 3-6), within "the symbolism of transience which characterised sixteenth- and seventeenth-century still life painting" (Hallam, E. 2001: 65).²⁴

It could be said that, wax in the Vanitas above (image 3-6), takes on two different roles, one that seeks to represent perfection and one that represents change and is in a constant state of deterioration. In this case, wax, which is representing the real and the ideal body, may be seen as both real and ideal and is expected to be able to fulfil both of those functions at the same time. But this is a contradiction, as the attempt to make wax reach the ideal image is always hampered by the knowledge that flesh and other fluid components like; blood, fat, tears, and sweat, which are contained within, threaten to spill out and transgress the boundaries of the ideal body. The ideal image then becomes a false surface that hides internal disorder (San Juan, R. M. 2013).

De Bruyckere's combination of coloured wax to produce her fragmented figures, and the way she has displayed these body parts in cabinets, could then be seen to hold a burdened relationship to death, through wax's association with the death mask, anatomical waxes and the votive offering. Of course, the conceptualisation of wax as material is continuously

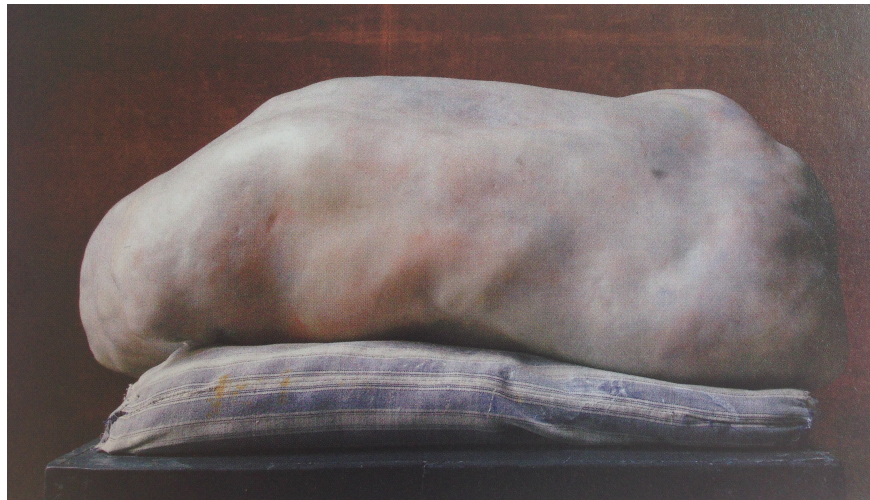
²⁴ The interpenetration of memento mori and medical illustration was already evident in illustrated books of anatomy from the Renaissance (Sawday, J. 2006: 112-15).

undergoing change, due in part to changes in the practices of display and to the combining of different types of objects in the same display cabinet. Thus, when the anatomical, religious, ethnographic all come into contact and inhabit the same space, the material resemblance may change the status of the object and with it, influence the meaning of wax as material.

Moreover, her sculptures are not simply ‘containers’ of meaning, but meaning in her sculptures arises from the combination of object, materiality, form, contextualisation, and the embodied encounter between viewer and object. This coming together of different aspects of the artwork can be seen as constantly evolving, as is the meaning of materiality and form, as well as the productive process between object and viewer.

3.4 The Process - Casting

In this section, I will show that casting is a central form of signification in De Bruyckere’s artwork; the combination of the casting process, which produces realistic life-size sculptures of body parts, together with the materials employed and the subject matter, enhances the emphatic participation of the spectator. The re-emergence of issues related to the body and embodiment during the 1980s and 1990s can be considered as being one of the main forces behind the increased use of casting as a sculptural technique.



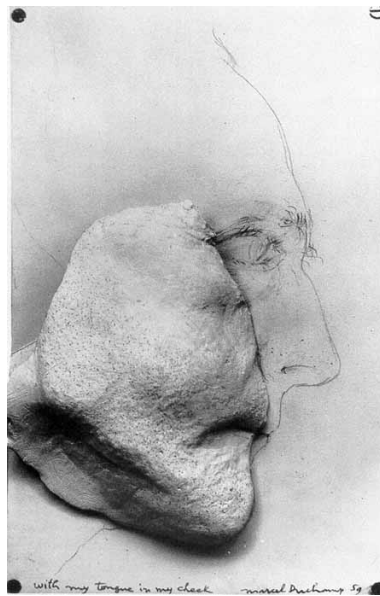
3-7: **Berlinde De Bruyckere**, *Etten Kemikteniz*, 2009-2010, wax, epoxy, iron, pillow and wood.

Casting with alginate produces a perfect likeness, for instance, every body part in De Bruyckere’s work, even in the more abstract ones like *Etten Kemikteniz* (2009-2010) (image 3-7), is easily recognisable as human and always presents very specific and personal details.

Cast from dancers' bodies, her sculpture engages the spectator's attention through the immediacy of its life-like details (Bozzi, N. (2013).

This ability of the casting process to reproduce the human features precisely has not always been valued (Shiff, R. 1997: 132). Despite its long history, spreading from the Neolithic Period to the present day, casting has often been criticised by art critics for producing just physical replicas of objects and has, therefore, been relegated to the role of 'working document'.²⁵

Sue Malvern draws a parallel between the vanishing importance of sculptural production by casting and the exclusion of classicism, realism and the body as subject matter during the modernist period. She sees the modernist attempt to exclude the process of casting from the art discourse as a way of excluding every form of reproduction that, like photography, involves an indexical relationship with the represented body (Malvern, S. 2010: 351-352 in Fredericksen, R.)²⁶



3-8: **Marcel Duchamp**, *With My Tongue in My Cheek*, 1959. Sculpture drawing: plaster, pencil, paper, and wood, 9 3/4 x 5 7/8 x 2, Georges Pompidou, Paris.

²⁵ The process of life casting was considered standard practice in the nineteenth century. Nevertheless, it held a controversial position in art historical debates and was often seen as "an insult to artistic creation", as reiterated in the overview of the exhibition '*Second Skin: Life Casting in the 19th Century*'. Life casts were deemed to lower aesthetic standards and were rather seen as a rational, mechanical and scientific way to capture 'nature'. Casting was compared with clay modelling, another process of artistic imitation. Unlike the latter, that required the intervention and interpretation of the artist, life casting, being considered a mechanical reproduction, was perceived as lacking originality. As the French sculptor, Jules Dalou, stated: "Neither life casting nor photography are or will ever be art. Art only exists as an interpretation of nature, whatever it may be. It is the spirit of nature that it is necessary to find, according to the needs of the subject and of the period. To force oneself to strictly reproduce nature is a great mistake" (Dalou, J. in Kinkel, M. 2011: 6-7).

²⁶ Moreover, at the beginning of the twentieth century, casting, which allowed museums to exhibit copies of antique work, continued to be the focus of a heated debate over the authenticity, uniqueness and authorship of artwork produced in that way (Buskirk, M. 2005: 72). Rosalind Krauss, examining the question of originality and authenticity in art, pointed out the artificiality of these concepts by taking as example, the 1978 casting of Rodin's '*The Gates of Hell*', produced sixty years after the artist's death (Krauss, R. 1986: 1-3).

Against the critique of being an inartistic technique, casting gained popularity in America in 1960s and 1970s, where artists such as Duane Hanson (1925-1996) and George Segal (1934-) used the process extensively to produce tableaux, figures or installations combining the human body with everyday objects (Schmahmann, B. 1998: 11,12). Krauss highlights the essential contribution of Duchamp in re-inscribing indexicality in art, when in 1959, he presented a drawn self-portrait, 'With my tongue in my cheek' (1959) (image 3-8), alongside a cast of his chin and cheek (Krauss, R. 1986: 206). Although artists such as Marcel Duchamp, Jasper Johns and George Segal, introduced life-like casts of body parts into their artwork, art critics continued to disapprove of casting because of the absence of the artist's intervention and, therefore, its intrinsic lack of creativity (Schmahmann, B. 1998: 12).

During the 1980s and 1990s, although still criticised as a "mechanistic and mindless technique", inartistic and, therefore, "regarded as cheating", the casting technique was often used as a means through which to reconfigure sculpture (Henry Moore Institute 2015). Female artists such as Helen Chadwick (1953- 1996), Rona Pondick, Janine Antoni (1964-), Alina Szapocznikow (1926-1973) and Sarah Lucas (1962-), to name just a few, have used casting to produce work concerned with the body and its biological processes.²⁷ In fact, one could argue that the inclusion of casting, as a 'respected and artistic' technique during this time, parallels themes relating to the body, such as embodiment and gender, which became central issues for feminist artists and art critics. Casting, with its close physical contact to the body, seemed to be the perfect tool with which to emphasise the role played by the lived body.²⁸

²⁷ Other artists that use life casting are: Jordan Baseman (1960-), Gilles Barbier (1965-), Don Brown, Ron Cooper (1943-), Katharina Fritsch (1956-), Robert Gober, Siobh'an Hapaska 91963-), Bruce Nauman (1941-), Javier Perez (1968-), Charles Ray (1953-), David Shapiro (1944-2014), Kiki Smith, Gavin Turk (1967-).

²⁸ Casting, as a sculptural technique, has been used in several different ways to produce a variety of artworks in the 1990s. Artists, such as Rachel Whiteread, who casts objects and spaces within or under objects, and also sometimes exhibits the cast itself as a sculpture, have widely contributed to the re-inscription and re-theorisation of this sculptural process within the art discourse. Janine Antoni in *Wean* (1989 – 1990) juxtaposes an imprint of her own breast and nipple, with an imprint of mass produced latex teats and the packaging that contained them. Antoni's negative mould 'immortalises' the separation between mother and child, the moment when the child has to give up the breast and the intimate contact with the mother's body, for the bottle with a latex nipple. The negative mould indicates an absence, in this case, the absence of the mother's breast. However, the implications of this artwork exceed the issue of the mother and child separation, as "this is a work where a form is marked by its negativity or its absence, and might be said to index history". Referencing Duchamp's cast of a breast in his artwork 'Prier de Toucher' (1947), Antoni's *Wean*, can be seen as a reflection "on the relationship of women artists of the 1990s to feminist artists of the 1970s and 1980s" (Malvern, S. 2010: 353 in Fredericksen, R. and Marchand, E.). In fact, *Wean* 1989 - 1990', with the introduction of the latex teats in the child's life, which can be seen as mass produced everyday objects, may also be reminiscent of Mary Kelly's work *Post-Partum Document* (1973-1979). However, in contrast to Mary Kelly's work, in which she purposely refused to represent the female body, Antoni explicitly shows the female form. Antoni also uses the casting technique as a way of replicating likeness.

Chadwick, in 1991-92, produced a series of plaster casts taken by the imprint left after she and her partner, David Notarius, urinated in the snow. This process turns the void created by the warm urine in the snow, into a three dimensional sculpture. She then placed the casts onto pedestals shaped like a hyacinth bulb. Cast in bronze and finished with a white layer of enamel, the twelve flowers were presented upside down, with the shapes left by the urine in the snow sticking up. Chadwick is especially interested in casting as a sculptural process for its indexicality and, therefore, the ability to "preserve a direct imprint of reality" (Sladen, M. 2004: 24-25). Another artist that presents the body as fragmented and sometimes

Interestingly, the examination of many of the art works created during the 1980s and 1990s, inscribed the casting process with new connotations, changing the attitude of artists, art critics and viewers towards it and expanding its potential as a sculptural process. Indeed, the more embodied view of subjectivity combined with the practice of casting in ‘unusual’ materials, shifted the perception of this production method. These new connotations can also be understood as part of what was happening in the art world during that time. As Martha Buskirk remarks:

The 1980s and 1990s have been characterised by artists who have felt free to pick and choose among the entire range of possibilities established since the late 1950s, pulling apart and recombining elements associated with many different movements” (Buskirk, M. 2005: 11).

The revival of casting as a sculptural technique remains relevant in the twenty-first century. Recently, the process of casting in art production has received increasing attention by scholars and curators. In 2002, for example, the Henry Moore institute in Leeds organised in collaboration with the Kunsthalle, Hamburg; the Musée d’Orsay, Paris; and the Museo Vela, Ligornetto ‘Second Skin’, an exhibition that explored the connection between life casting and sculpture (Henry Moore Institute 2015). By showing the different casting techniques used to produce a variety of artworks, this exhibition highlighted its absence from art historical debates. In 2014, Skarstedt, a gallery in New York and London, grouped the work of several contemporary artists²⁹ under the title of ‘Cast From Life’, as a means to explore the different ways these artist used the casting process “to mould meaning” (Skarstedt 2014).

Berlinde De Bruyckere, in 1999 began experimenting with casting during the production of her ‘blanket-women’s series (image 4-9). Her aim was to find a sculptural process and materials that would make the visible part of the legs in *Sprekken* (image 3-3) seem real (Douglas, S. 2009). It took her two years to perfect the technique she had first seen at Madame Tussauds (Kulturfalter, 2011).

performing vulgar gesture to create abject sensation in the spectator is Sarah Lucas. For her sculptures, *Get Hold of This* 1994-95’ and *You Know What*, 1998’, she casts the body parts directly from her body (Malvern, S. 2010: 353 in Fredericksen, R. and Marchand, E).

²⁹ Sculpture by Robert Gober, George Condo (1957-), Ugo Rondinone (1964-), Peter Fischli & David Weiss, Mike Kelley (1954-2012), Isa Genzken (1948-), Rachel Harrison (1966-), Martin Kippenberger (1953-1997), Jeff Koons (1955-), Juan Muñoz (1953-2001), Cady Noland (1956-), Franz West (1947- 2012), Thomas Schütte (1954-) and Rebecca Warren (1965).



3-9: **Berlinde De Bruyckere**, *Into One-Another I To P.P.P.*, Detail, 2010

As discussed above, the indexical nature of casting and the fragility and ephemerality of wax in De Bruyckere's artwork, become a signifier of impermanence and loss. The body or body part, casts directly from the model's body or animal corpse, similar to the death mask, takes the place of its absence, becoming a visual and physical reminder of what has been lost. Casting, with its ability to preserve a shape of the transient, offers the opportunity to capture and suspend the past. Indeed, the process has been extensively used to immortalise the image of human beings, either for private use with the death mask, or for commemorative purposes in the form of commemorative busts.³⁰ De Bruyckere's use of body casts, however, is different

³⁰ This connection of casting process to death dates back to seventh or eighth millennium BC as gauze strips dipped in plaster were used to cast the body of the dead Pharaohs. Apparently first employed in early Arabic culture 10000 to 8000 BD the practice of modelling the skulls of their ancestors with plaster was adopted first by the Greek and later on by the Roman. The art of producing death masks was perfected in Rome. The masks were made of plaster, wax, or indirectly in metal. They took an important place as religious objects in funeral rites of ancient Egypt and Rome. With the decline of the Roman Empire casting seemed to lose its appeal and we had to wait until the Renaissance for life and death casting to reappear as a mean for the nobility to immortalise their image (Ward, G. 2008: 91; Panzanelli, R. 2008: 23).

from the nineteenth century tradition of using casting to immortalise famous and important people. Although the precise skin quality of the surface in her work forces the viewer to recognise a particular human being in the represented body, the absence of the head and the abstractness of the form are used as tools to evoke a shared humanity.³¹

The body parts are cast from real bodies and are immediately recognisable as human; this quality invites the spectators to visually imagine themselves within the body. This invitation will affect viewers in different ways: on one hand, as will be discussed in chapter five, the artwork may cause feelings of abjection as a defence mechanism in dealing with the inevitability of death and decay. On the other hand, however, this familiarity and extreme similarity to the lived body, enhances identification with it. Of particular interest for this investigation, is the fact that casting, as a process, not only produces a perfect likeness, an indexical representation of the model, but also preserves traces of the body in the created object. This connection between the impressions left by the body and the casting process, points to the tendency of human beings, to leave traces in the world. This remaining physical connection between the sculptural object and the body that stood inside may also unsettle the spectator and generate uncertainty. It could then be argued that there is a connection between the uncertainty and unsettling feelings generated by the sculptural process and the initial impact of the artwork on the viewer.

Traditionally to produce the final work, the separate cast parts of the body are usually joined together in a way that conceals the joints. In many life-casting manuals, the process ends with the cleaning and perfecting of the seam lines. However, in De Bruyckere's sculptures, as image 3-9 shows, the joining lines are visibly rough and imprecise; often attracting attention through the extra material, which seems to secrete from the imperfection of the body almost like an overflow of unwanted bodily information. The viewer, confronted with these lines, may become aware of the sculptural process behind these represented bodies that have been obtained from casts of the 'lived bodies'. In fact, the presence or memory of the 'lived-body' in the representation through physical contact, does not only point to the body inside the mould but also to the body that shaped the work; the body of the sculptor. Through the visibility of the process, the viewer is made aware of the narrator. Indeed, Walter Benjamin contends that the end product always "bears the marks of the storyteller much as the earthen vessel bears the marks of the potter's hand" (Benjamin, W. 2011: 156). Attracting

³¹ For a discussion of the notion of 'shared humanity' in De Bruyckere's artwork see chapter seven.

attention to the link between casting, as a sculptural process, and the lived body, may again point to the blurring of boundaries between the artwork itself and the body of both the spectator and the sculptor. Moreover, although De Bruyckere's artwork often reproduces the apparent neutrality of the museum's display, the visibility and roughness of the seams separate them from the 'realist' representation that cancels out the marks of their production. De Bruyckere's figures are presented clearly as made objects.

De Bruyckere's casts, although indexical, contradict the perfect likeness inherent in the casting process as her sculptures are created through the combination of several slightly different casts of the same body part in order to create a new body piece. She asks her models, many of whom are dancers, to perform "until she sees a movement expressing what she is looking for; then she takes a plaster cast of parts of the body in that attitude. The fragments are ultimately recombined to form a wax sculpture" (Stamps, L. 2014). Even though she begins every figure taking separate casts of a model in a certain position, the end result, through the combination and transformation of every body part, creates a whole new body. As the artist explains, "the act of putting together, heating, lengthening, thickening a rump or a limb are what make a figure. It has to correspond to a state of mind" (Berlinde De Bruyckere, 2006).

This combination of casts taken at different times disrupts the linearity of time and may be seen as containing several pasts. The concept of 'time' in her work could then be understood and connected to movement in space. This combination of stasis and movement, of temporary time suspension and visible action in the bodies in De Bruyckere's sculptures, seems to have the power to draw the spectator in to the personal suffering of the body being represented. We could, therefore, argue that the casting technique used in some of De Bruyckere's sculptures, facilitates the affective connection between different moments in time, paralleling the fact that traumatic events are never completely overcome or dealt with; they generate a different temporality where the 'before and after' merge into a single sculpture, unsettling the linearity of time. Moreover, the uncanny surface and the introduction of the 'time' concept in her sculptures, not only confuses the line between life-like detail and abstraction, but also positions the self as 'dynamic' and constantly changing.

In this chapter, I have shown that subject matter, materials, sculptural processes, form and context in Berlinde De Bruyckere's artwork, all contribute to the enhancement of the spectators' bodily involvement, by tapping into their personal embodied and 'tacit dimension' of knowledge. I have devoted particular attention to the way in which the 'whole sensorium',

influences the reception and interpretation of De Bruyckere's sculptures, establishing the importance of the sense of touch and of implicit knowledge, in the perception and understanding of De Bruyckere's artwork. I have argued that experiencing an artwork in a haptic way, converts the act of looking, into an experience of imaginative touching. Sculptural technique and the materials used in Berlinde De Bruyckere's sculptures, converge to convey and emphasise body fragmentation. I have shown that the choice of materials and the processes chosen by De Bruyckere to form her sculptures and installations, generate associations that interact with the shape and aesthetic of the final piece, thus helping to establish the reading of the work. The materials employed to create these representations of body parts, such as wax, fabric, and old furniture pieces, together with the forms into which they are shaped, are important elements in helping to frame the artwork.

I have also emphasised the importance of the casting process in enhancing the emphatic participation of the spectator, through the link between artwork and the body of the spectator. Casting, with its indexical connection to the body, renders the body part human and familiar, even when presented in an abstract or fragmented form. It is especially when the human form is recognised as human but perceived as different, that the viewer may experience uncanny and disconcerting feelings.

4 Body Fragmentation and the Artwork of Berlinde De Bruyckere

This chapter indicates the relevant contemporary debates that converge in De Bruyckere's art practice, providing a base on which to understand and situate her sculptures and installations within the wider western contemporary cultural landscape. I will argue that the way in which De Bruyckere represents the body can be interpreted/seen as a continuation of the shift started in the 1980s and 1990s in contemporary art, in which artists began utilising the body as fragmented and vulnerable not only to convey the uncertainty and vulnerability of the human condition, but also to express the fluidity and multiplicity of the self. The goal of this chapter, however, is not to review all of the artist's installations and sculptures, but to describe her artistic journey and point out her numerous sources of reference. I will argue that the artwork of De Bruyckere is not only engaged with history through quotations and references, but it can also act as a political and social tool.

Berlinde De Bruyckere uses sculptures of fractured, vulnerable and open bodies, as a vehicle with which to visually express existential concerns and to communicate physical and psychological pain. An important thread that runs throughout this enquiry, cutting across themes, therefore, will be the apparent contradiction between the need of some artists, at the very beginning of the twenty-first century, to address a shared human condition, and the anti-essentialist and anti-humanist stance of postmodernism.

4.1 Berlinde De Bruyckere: The 1990s

De Bruyckere has been working with the human figure since the early 1990s, first referring to the absent body, stacking blankets on furniture, in "response to news footage she had seen of refugees in Rwanda", and then creating bodies made out of wax and covering them in wool or blankets (images 4-1, 4-2, 4-3, 5-4 and image 4-8) (ACCA, 2012).

The motivation to reproduce objects and figures reminiscent of the fate of thousands of refugees was prompted by the broadcasted images of the genocide in Rwanda (1994) (Kunstmuseum Bern, 2011). In the 1990s, the ethnic cleansing and systematic rape before and during the war in the former Yugoslavia came to prominence in the media. The 1994 Rwandan genocide, one of the most appalling, brutal and systematic attacks against humanity since the Holocaust, seemed to evade the attentive eye of the international media, and the suffering of the Rwandan people was felt as a distant echo in the West, (James, E. 2004: 132).



4-1: **Berlinde De Bruyckere**, *Slaapzaal III*, 1999, blankets and wood.
Installation view, Begijnhof, Hasselt, Belgium

De Bruyckere's work *Slaapzaal* (1999) (image 4-1) could be seen as a reminder of the lost opportunities to take action and stand against this atrocity.



4-2: **Berlinde De Bruyckere**, *The Zone*, 1996, blankets, wood, glass, wool, branches, plastic, iron and rubber, 435 x 650 x 270

War, and what human beings are able to inflict on other human beings - as Freud already described in *Civilisation And Its Discontent* - is a central theme in De Bruyckere's artwork. *The Zone* (1996) was created at a time when the wars in former Yugoslavia and Rwanda made headline news. Location and time of violence may change, but, as confirmed by recent events,

the images of war, loss, and the tides of displaced people and their plight during a conflict, always remain the same (image 4-3 a/b).



4-3a: Rescue boat with Syrian Refugees (July 2015)



4-3b: Refugees landing in Lesbos (Sept. 2015)

De Bruyckere's artwork, although it is inspired by real events, does not function as a representation of the event but rather highlights social, cultural and political issues by exploiting their interconnection to affect and emotions. One could argue, that in her artwork she makes feelings such as fear, anxiety and desire visible. Moreover, as will be discussed in chapter five, by appealing to the spectator's sensory perception, the artist may activate memories of other events and in this way address collective memories.

In *Slaapzaal III* (1999), (image 4-1), the blankets neatly folded or piled on beds, function as a reminder that there should have been people there. The viewer is asked to meditate on this absence. The undistributed blankets - a metaphor for the missing bodies – demonstrate what Patrick Fuery describes as “secondary absence”, which through its connection to the missing presence of the suffering bodies, may point to suffering, hunger, prison camps and massacre, (Fuery, P. 1995: 1).¹

For De Bruyckere, blankets can present and solicit both positive and negative feelings, as she explains:

A blanket tucks you in; you feel like the child sitting indoors while it's raining outside. I also use the blanket as a negative object. You can give someone so much love and safety that it smothers him that he can no longer find himself. Lying under a pile of blankets can be disorienting! I like to play with that ambiguity in my work (De Bruyckere, B).²

Blankets are soft and warm and can provide a sense of security. A pile of blankets neatly

¹ For a further discussion on the dyad presence-absence see chapter five.

² Saatchi Gallery: Berlinde De Bruyckere. Exhibited At The Saatchi Gallery. Available from: http://www.saatchigallery.com/artists/berlinde_debruyckere_articles.htm [Accessed 20.02.2014].

folded may evoke a sense of humanitarian aid in the case of a natural disaster, but can also infer military and governmental efficiency. A heap of woollen blankets neatly folded enclosed in a cage becomes increasingly burdensome and oppressive, (image 4-4). Every blanket could become a metaphor for an unjust imprisonment or undelivered help. These blankets, prepared to assist, to keep warm and comfort, may speak of need, atrocities and trauma, as well as the indifference of the western world when faced with “the pain of others” (Sontag, S. 2004).

There are parallels here between De Bruyckere’s sculptural vocabulary and that of the British-Palestinian artist Mona Hatoum (1952-), who explores themes of home and displacement through the perspective of her Palestinian exile, using common domestic objects that often, on closer inspection, reveal menacing qualities. Inspired by Sol LeWitt's minimalist modular units, Hatoum in her *Light Sentence* (1992) built a cage like structures in order to convey menace, danger and the sense of the uncanny with the familiar objects that surround us (Smith, A. 2016). De Bruyckere’s cages and den in images (4-4, 4-5 and 4-6), similarly to Hatoum’s *Light Sentence* (1992), incorporate contradicting motifs of protection and containment.



4-4: **Berlinde De Bruyckere**, *Dekenhuis*, 1993, ijze en denkens, 200cm x 365cm x 120cm

In later work, the cage-sculpture in De Bruyckere’s artwork evolves into a den (image 4-5). The metal structure is covered and disappears under layers of worn blankets, mattresses and patchwork. The cage becomes invisible, but is nonetheless still present. The house could function as both, a symbol of protection or a source of confinement and repression (Ansen, S.

2012: 9). This tent could indeed provide shelter, but it could also be a cage, a personal prison. “The ‘blanket house’, a den like the ones we built in our childhood as a place of protection: though at the same time they were utterly claustrophobic” (Ruyter, M. 2002: 226).



4-5: **Berlinde De Bruyckere**, *Dekenhuis*, 1993, 200cm x 365cm x 120cm

Berlinde De Bruyckere’s cage structure *Kooi* (1989) (image 4-6), conjures up many symbolic associations. It may signify withdrawal into a false reality, as a reminder of the restrictions imposed by society, but also imprisonment, passivity, lifelessness and enslavement.



4-6: **Berlinde De Bruyckere**, *Kooi*, 1989, beeldhouwwerk/ collection verbeke foundation

Form and materials used in her earlier work, such as *Kooi* (1989) or *I Never Promised You a Rosegarden* (1991) (image 4-7), share several similarities with the Italian movement Arte

Povera. Indeed, De Bruyckere began to work as an artist in the 1980s and initially she was particularly inspired by the aesthetic of Arte Povera to produce abstract and geometric constructions, mostly built with hard materials like metal and concrete (Ansen, S. 2012: 9).³ This emphasis on the material aspect and the attentive choice of materials depending on the specificity of every artwork plays a significant role in De Bruyckere's practice. In her sculptures and installations De Bruyckere combines sculptural materials with every day and found objects, encouraging in this way, the viewer's active interaction and engagement with the work.⁴ Indeed, the readymade materials may encourage the spectators to project their own personal experiences and feelings arising from the already familiar and known objects. As with many contemporary artists, De Bruyckere has been strongly influenced by the considerable aesthetic shift in thinking about sculpture and the approach to the choice of and use of materials, subject matter, and place of display that was typical of the 1960s. Post-minimalist artists especially, with their criticism of the modernist aesthetic, have been an important source of inspiration for artists such as De Bruyckere because, as Le Roy suggests, they paved the way for "postmodernism and its fixation on art historical references and fragments". In addition, towards the end of the 1960s, "post-minimalism, anti-form, process art, land art, and Arte Povera", appeared to be particularly attracted to chance, disorder and decay, all themes that De Bruyckere continued in her work (Le Roy, F. 2011: 34). The division between categories in art, such as painting, sculpture or film, became blurred. This shift from an entirely material practice towards the inclusion of a much broader range of activities deeply influenced sculptural practice. Sculpture could then encompass a traditional three-dimensional object, but also an intervention in the landscape, an action, a live performance, or a video. Artists such as Bourgeois (1911-2010), Alina Szapocznikow (1926-1973), Eva Hesse (1936-1970), Lynda Benglis (1941-), Rona Pondick (1952-) and kiki Smith (1954-) introduced into their practice 'new' more malleable and at times fetish-like materials, such as leather, rubber, fiberglass, vinyl, wax, and polythene (Krauss, R. 1979: 37; Benjamin, A. 1997: 14; Causey, A. 1998: 251-255; McEvelley T. 1999: 123).

³ The art critic Germano Celant coined the term Arte Povera in 1967 to describe a movement often associated with conceptual art that emerged and flourished in the 1960s and 1970s, alongside "body-art, land-art and performance art". Celant not only identified the Italian artists belonging to this movement but also formulated the premises of the group in exhibition catalogues, articles, and a book in 1969, which also included non-Italians artists (Sandler, I. 1996: 102; Chilvers, I. 1999: 118; McEvelley, T. 1999: 139).

⁴ Although the use of 'worthless' or 'culturally rejected' objects to produce the artworks, seemed to be the defining element of Arte Povera (Chilvers, I. 1999: 32), Martin Holman writes that Arte Povera, was less concerned with the materials used but more with the way in which those materials were utilised to extend the power of the imagination, "to free consciousness from conventions of language and representation". As the artist Pistoletto argued, the "material is chosen for each work with respect to a particular necessity. No material is more modern or less modern" (Holman, M. 2011; Hoffman, K. 1991: 139).

In the installation, *I Never Promised You a Rosegarden* (1991) (image 4-7), for instance, De Bruyckere orderly displayed a set of used baskets containing roses on a wooden rack. Roses, which are normally associated with romantic love, in this installation, are made of poisonous lead and “cast from sorrow” (Marc Ruyter, 2002: 225).



4-7: **Berlinde De Bruyckere**, *I Never Promised You a Rosegarden*, 1991, iron, baskets, lead and plastic, 260 × 250 × 120 cm

Like Marcel Duchamp (1887- 1968), Joseph Beuys (1921-1986), Robert Rauschenberg (1925-2008), Louise Bourgeois and, Eva Hesse, for whom recycled materials already incorporated memories and events, De Bruyckere uses blankets, baskets and other found objects in a different context, giving them new meanings.⁵ Every blanket, every found object, creates a connection to ‘the past’ and may link the story of the people that used them before, with the present. The inclusion of everyday objects may also help the viewer to establish a link between the ‘real’ world and the art object. De Bruyckere, however, often transforms a familiar object, such as the roses in the installation *I Never Promised You a Rosegarden* (1991), into something unusual and strange in order to generate uncanny and abject feelings in the spectators.⁶ De Bruyckere however does not only use postmodern techniques, such as the inclusion of ‘found objects’, references in her artwork, but she also includes the language of

⁵ The 1960s saw a re-emergence of the work of Duchamp and his ‘ready-made’, (McEvelley, T. 1999: 62-63). As Amelia Jones states Duchamp could be considered the father of postmodernism, for his idea of the ready-made, (Jones, A. 2009:156).

⁶ See chapter five.

craft, blurring the boundaries between low and high art. Moreover, as has been discussed in chapter three, her figures are frequently resting on old cloths with frayed edges, which parallel the fragmented state of the displayed bodies.

For O'Reilly, the use of everyday objects and ephemeral materials in art has been influenced by the shift in philosophical thinking, which questions 'metaphysical truths', together with advances in science and technology, which in turn extend the boundaries of the body and challenge its stability. She sees the correlation between the elevation of the mundane in contemporary art and the artist's choice of subject matter, as a possible reason for the disappearance of "big questions of God or death". Most contemporary artists, she claims, tend to represent the "leakage between interior emotional life and exterior physicality", (O'Reilly, S. 2010: 29). This investigation, however, argues that Berlinde De Bruyckere's sculptures of fractured, vulnerable and open bodies, successfully combines both the fluidity between the psychological inner life and the physical exteriority with 'existential themes'. As Jörg Scheller writes:

De Bruyckere has an anthropological and ahistorical image of humanity, positioning the great existential themes of the modernist period in a more contemporary context, thus connecting our indifferent times with the impassioned ones of the first part of the 20th century (Bühler, K. 2011).

Conveying shared human existential issues with a particular and sexed body, however, raises several questions. According to postmodern debates, the representation of a female or male body can never represent humanity or shared emotions. Postmodernism accentuates discontinuity in human experiences and raises serious suspicions about claims of shared experiences. Emotions and experiences are always relative to one's perspective, which is influenced by personal events, history, social class, gender, culture, and religion.

On the other hand, De Bruyckere addresses 'the human condition' through the affect produced by subject matter, form, materials, sculptural process, and presentation. As the artist explains, she highlights often-ignored themes in order to draw attention to the limitations of language to communicate physical and psychological suffering. Her ultimate goal is to promote the 'shareability' of these emotions through a heightened bodily and affective engagement by the viewer (Kulturfolger, 2011). Even if we agree that the artist represents her very particular point of view, which may not necessarily engage everybody in the same way, it is nevertheless, possible to argue that her artworks contribute to the enhancement of the spectator's bodily involvement and therefore, might resonate on an emotional level with many

spectators.

Where can De Bruyckere's work be situated then? Does she use the body fragment in her artworks to draw attention to the lost, but single whole? Does the body fragment in her sculptures become an opportunity for plurality? And does this plurality of opportunities necessarily mean the impossibility of an intra-subjective awareness?

4.2 From Wholeness to Body Fragmentation

There is no agreement amongst the various voices in the history of art about if and when the shift from wholeness, towards body fragmentation, took place. The independent body fragment, however, is not a new phenomenon, as it dates back to antiquity. Body parts, used as 'spare heads', were found in ancient Egyptian tombs. Another type of fragment, were the busts used in Greek and Roman art; each one presented as a synecdoche of the whole figure as well as a representation that the body part that needed healing had been left outside the temple, (Barash, M. 2000: 69). In fact, most knowledge about ancient civilisations has been attained through analysing and interpreting fragments usually caused by loss or damage.

The lost age of wholeness can be traced back to the representations of dissections, mutilations and decapitation in late medieval theatre. First in Italy, then elsewhere in Europe, there was a fascination with the fragmentation of the human form. To determine the cause of death, autopsies were performed and the dissection of cadavers became accepted practice in medical schools (Cohen, J. 1999: 96). The most common form of body fragment during the Middle Ages was the religious relic.

Relics were remains like hands, fingers, hearts, teeth, hair, bones, and even objects that allegedly came into contact with the bodies of the Saints. The corpses of Saints were frequently opened to search for signs of holiness sealed inside the body. The many parts of the dismembered Saintly body were then enclosed and displayed in elaborate reliquaries. Here again, the body fragment was not conceived as an independent entity because the aim of the church was to remember and praise the deeds and the suffering of the Saint as a whole person (Jäger, S. 2012: 126; Barash, M. 2000: 70).



4-8: **Berlinde De Bruyckere**, *Detail II*, 2009, wax, wood, iron, epoxy, glass

The art historian Linda Nochlin, instead, situates body fragmentation in the 1790s, as a response to the French Revolution (Nochlin, L. 2001: 8). She places it at the core of modernity, stating that the body fragment in art serves a variety of possible goals. She cautions against a “grandiose, all-encompassing theory”, or unified discourses of the body fragment in visual representation, preferring instead, to treat fragments “as a series of discrete, ungeneralizable situations” (ibid: 56). The body fragment, she contends, may represent nostalgia for a lost totality, such as a fragment of an antique statue (ibid: 8), or may draw attention to the fact that the human body is always just a step away from pain and death (ibid: 18). The body fragment may also be used as a substitute for something else, a fetish (ibid: 38); or as synecdoche for the whole body; as a suggestion of sexual availability placed out of the frame like the fragmentation of women in Manet's work; as a method of portraying “sexually suggestive undertones” (ibid: 40).

Additionally, during the late eighteenth and nineteenth century Ancient Greek and Roman sculptures were rediscovered and excavated and begun to populate the emerging public museums. These fragments represented the western Empires and their powers, underpinning their dominant model of values (classicism / neo-classicism). It is there that the drive for the compensatory fantasies may in part be anchored.⁷ In fact, often these ancient objects 'survived'

⁷ See chapter five.

as fragments, either damaged or recycled from the edifices and ruins of Greek Antiquity as building materials.⁸

Helaine Posner and Rosalind Krauss, instead, locate the shift from wholeness to conscious body fragmentation at the end of the nineteenth century, when “major advances in the natural sciences, began radically to reshape the human psyche”, influencing and giving momentum to the surveying of the notion of fragmentation in the works of the avant-garde artists, from Rodin through to the cubists and the surrealists (Posner, H. 1992: 30; Krauss, R. 1981: 23-30). Indeed, Rodin, inspired by Michelangelo’s unfinished sculptures, played a major role in establishing the body fragment as an art form. For him, the human figure did not have to be finished or whole, as he invested the body fragment with the ability to communicate ‘gesture’, and therefore, be effective in conveying emotional states (Krauss, R. 1981: 9). Choosing Michelangelo’s unfinished sculptures as his model (for the pose in the *Age of Bronze*), Rodin discarded the last three hundred fifty years of sculptural tradition and brought a new form of naturalism, “an illusion of reality, of the living body” into sculpture (Tucker, W. 2005: 25). In 1909, Georg Simmel, stated that in opposition to “ancient sculpture that sought out the body logic, Rodin sculptures seeks its psychology”. Rodin’s sculptures were not only a clear manifestation of modernity, but also the “resolution of modernity’s contradictions”. For him, both content and form presented unfinished characteristics, giving, in this way, the opportunity for a plurality of meanings to the viewer (Frisby, D. 2013: 62). Rosalind Krauss too, interprets the marks on Rodin’s sculpture as a conscious act by the artist to push the viewer to recognise the production process and with it, the fact that the process of experience and the creation of meaning happen simultaneously (Krauss, R. 1981: 29-30).

Several factors contributed to the success of the body fragment in sculpture in the nineteenth century. The enormous economic, social and cultural changes in the European cities, together with the more mobile form of social organisation, had profound psychological consequences. Karl Marx saw an increasing degree of fragmentation of social life in the capitalist mode of production, where capital and labour are separated, whilst Charles Baudelaire captured the fragmented and disconnected nature of everyday urban experience. Baudelaire appealed to artists to find and represent modernity as it exists, which he described as “le transitoire, le fugitif, le contingent” (Freeman, H. 1994: 75).

⁸ J.G Winckelmann and architect Gottfried Semper for instance engaged in a vivid debate about the status of these works. It is from these fragments that the favouring of the white marble sculpture emanates too, as the vivid coloration on Greek sculptures had been eroded / ‘washed off’ over time (Hägele, H, 2013: 65)

Although painting was still the medium par excellence for most art movements connected with impressionism, the phenomenon of representing a fragment of the whole figure as a finished work of art was mainly happening in sculpture.⁹ The theoretical reflections on the basic principles of sculpture, and the fact that these changes were a contemporary of impressionist painting, played a significant role in the recognition of the fragment as sculptural form. The departure from the sculptural tradition of the whole figure to the fragmentary state can be seen as a significant part of the heritage of nineteenth century sculpture. Indeed, during the second half of the nineteenth century, body fragments as an art form became more visible and accepted, (Tucker, W. 2005: 15; Vance, R. 1995: 217).

Art historians set the precedent for the acceptance of the fragment as an art form. During their studies at the Academy, they were confronted with the ‘unfinished’ work of influential artists of the past (e.g. Michelangelo).¹⁰ The interest and fascination these fragmented works seemed to stir in the viewer, challenged the aesthetical tradition inherited from the Greek, and pushed the art historian to re-think the role of the fragment in art. The fact that Michelangelo, a genius-artist, left so many unfinished works was a matter of much discussion for scholars at the turn of the century. Additionally, debates on the restoration of damaged monuments drew attention and provided scholarly visibility to sculpture’s fragmentary state (Barash, M. 2000: 71-76).

Although artists at the end of the nineteenth century produced finished fragmented figures, Barash seems to lament the lack of a systematic theoretical treatment of the fragment, as almost no record is known of the intellectual process in which the fragmentary figure was created (ibid: 72). Reflections on the fragmented figure took place mainly in literature and philosophy, (Friedrich Schiller, Friedrich Hegel, Friedrich Nietzsche). The French Poet Paul Valery, for instance, in his ‘Fragments du Narcisse’, written in 1890, gave to the fragment a theoretical narrative. For him, the fragment had a character and value of its own that could only be found in the unfinished work, (Wallace, F. 2010: 120).

⁹ There is a difference in aesthetic perception between a damaged sculpture and a damaged painting. In contrast to the damaged painting, the sculpture in a fragmentary state is still perceived as aesthetically pleasing, (David Martin, F. 1978: 47). Our taste and sensibility seems to have adapted to the fragmentary state, because we are so used to seeing objects displayed as pieces of a lost whole (Clark, K. in Hyde, S. 1997: 50). However, for Tessa Adams, these views cannot explain the enormous interest in the fragmentary object (Adams, T. 2007). Fuller rationalised this aestheticisation of the fragmented object and tried to explain our interest in fragmented antique artefacts damaged through time, using different psychological accounts, (Fuller, P. 1980: 85). He situated the fragmented figure in the “unconscious compensatory fantasies that serve the aestheticisation of the degraded artefact” (Adams, T. 2007).

¹⁰ St. Matteo, the tomb of Pope Julius II, the tomb of the Medici, the Pieta (Barash, M. 2000: 74).

The two World Wars in the twentieth century played a significant role in shifting the representation of the body, as they left Europe increasingly fragmented and disillusioned. Representing the body as fragmented and mutilated became an artistic metaphor to express the anxiety of the moment. Indeed, fragmentation seems to appear as a subject in art especially during times of conflict, as a way of describing how both individual and society fall apart during periods of violence. The ability to destroy life on a massive scale and so systematically the constant threat of the atomic bombs and the horrifying discoveries in the concentration camps, made the whole world seem more irrational and less humane (Wingate, J. 2013: 181). “The fully enlightened earth radiates disaster triumphant”, remarked the philosophers Adorno and Horkheimer after World War II (Adorno, T. and Horkheimer, M. 1997: 3). The body as a motif in sculpture, reappeared not in its perfect shape, but disfigured and crippled. As a way of coping with and reflecting on the damage war inflicts on individuals, several artists turned to the fragmented body as the main subject of their artworks, strongly affecting its representation in visual art.¹¹ Annette Michelson noted a significant trend towards the representation of the fragmented body in the 1950s and 1960s, rationalising body fragmentation in terms of the Kleinian part-object (Michelson, A. 1991: 48).¹²

In the 1950s and 1960s, the persistence of the part-object in art, often incorporated in the neo-dada movement, was seen as a temporary regression to the negative aesthetic of the earlier avant-garde. This trend towards the part object in works of artists such as Bourgeois, Hesse, and Yayoi Kusama (1929-), frequently regarded as proto-feminist, has also been interpreted as the beginning of gender politics (Nixon, M. 2005: 248). In the 1970s, feminist artists, such as Judy Chicago (1939-) and Eva Hesse brought a fresh perspective to the representation of the body fragment and instigated some of the most groundbreaking changes in painting, sculpture, photography, film, performance, and installation. The body, as a means of expressing various facets of human concerns, always played a central role in the western feminist art movement. During the late 1980s and early 1990s the body, especially in its

¹¹ Salvador Dali (1904-1989), Louise Bourgeois, Jasper Johns (1930-), Willem de Kooning (1904-1997), Alberto Giacometti (1901-1966), Frank Auerbach (1931-). In England’s such Francis Bacon (1909-1992), and Henry Moore (1898-18986) stretched the boundaries of figurative representation of the body.

¹² Melanie Klein in her Object-Relation theory gave the part-object a prominent role in the formation and fragmentation of the ego. The breast as a part-object for instance plays an essential role in the development of the child’s ego, but can also cause psychic imbalances, which may cause an excessive attention to certain body parts. As Melanie Klein writes, “The various ways of splitting the ego and internal objects result in the feeling that the ego is in bits. This feeling amounts to a state of disintegration. In normal development, the states of disintegration which the infant experiences are transitory ... In adult patients, states of depersonalization and of schizophrenic dissociation seem to be a regression of these infantile states of disintegration” (Mitchell, J. 1987: 184-185).

fragmented form, was explored as a way of expressing anxiety about the social, political, physical and psychological attack on human beings.

Even though there is no agreement amongst art historians when the interest in the representation of the fragmented body began, the psychologist Heinz Kohut notes that the artists seem to be the first to recognise the fragmentation of the self (Larratt-Smith, P. 2012: 19). The subject, at the end of the twentieth century, is seen as fragmented, contradictory, speaking from a particular place and from a particular point of view. According to Frederic Jameson, “the transformation of reality into images, and the fragmentation of time into a series of perpetual presents” are the main features showing a clear correlation between the sense of fragmentation felt by individuals and the alienation typical of the late twentieth century (Jameson, F. in Hal Foster, 1998: 144).

In fact, the representation of the fragmented body is often associated with the postmodern characteristic in which subjects are no longer seen as unitary wholes, speaking from one place with a sense of authority.

For David Hillman and Carla Mazzio the rejection of all forms of totality, including the corporeal, is a crucial characteristic of postmodernism. They consider the rise of significance of the body fragment in contemporary culture a defining subject, (Hillman, D. and Mazzio C. 1997: xii). Anderson also links the fragmentation of the self to the ‘postmodern’ lifestyle in which the subjects are more and more alienated from their communities and are forced to assume many different roles in order to survive (Anderson, W. 1997: 53).

The exhibition ‘Corporal Politics’ shown at the MIT List Visual Arts Center between the 11th of December 1992 and the 7th February in 1993 is often described as proof of the intense fascination with the fragmented body during the 1990s (Owen, M. 2005: 13; Hall, D. 1992: 23).¹³ Posner's essay on human fragmentation developed the idea that the de-contextualised, fragmented body “speaks” (Hall, D. 1992: 30). Posner maintained that the dismembered body is essentially a body that denotes vulnerability and anxiety. “The dismemberment of the body in late-twentieth-century art”, she writes, “is no accident. It is the result of living in a world in which violence, oppression, social injustice, and physical and psychological stress predominate” (Hall, D. 1992: 30), rendering past ideals of wholeness out-dated.¹⁴ She situates

¹³ In 1992, the exhibition *Corporal Politics* strongly influenced the representation of fragmented bodies. In his essay Thomas Laqueur sustained that the exhibition was met with controversy especially because of its political implications (Hall, D. 1992: 14). The exhibition was important because of its recognition of the body in pieces as a significant form of representation in the 1990s.

¹⁴ Throughout art history artists have been fascinated with the human form and have represented it ideally, realistically, symbolically, and allegorically. The Greek ideal of classical beauty and “The glorification of the human body in the form of

the body fragment as a “...highly charged metaphor for the psychological, social, political, and physical assaults on the individual”, which provided visibility to the discourse of pain and disease, especially in relation to the HIV/AIDS crisis. For her, the representations of the body in fragments should be read as an indicator of “urgent concerns”, such as sexism, sexual identity, sexual oppression, and loss, where there necessarily occurs an assault on the integrity of the whole body. From this assault inevitably arises a sense of disconnection (Hall, D. 1992: 22). Thomas Laqueur concurred with this observation, asserting that the fragmented and “decontextualised body is not ‘silenced’ by its dismemberment”, and claimed that “there [was] something to be said” about its condition (Ibid: 15).

Violence, oppression and injustice however, are not limited to the twentieth century, so it may seem natural to ask what drives contemporary artists to increasingly use the body in its fragmented form to communicate their concerns. During the course of the twentieth century, many discoveries and innovations challenged established theories and beliefs altering the way individuals perceived themselves and their role in the universe. Quantum theory, which challenged the concept of the world as deterministic and totally predictable; psychoanalytical theories, which questioned human rationality; and the industrial revolution, which massively accelerated technological development and absorbed the individual into the anonymity of the crowd; all contributed to cause anxiety.¹⁵ It may not be a surprise, therefore, that in the late twentieth century, art debates saw an increased representation of the body in pieces as a direct consequence of the social, political, physical and psychological attack on human beings.

The distinct difference between the ideal and the real body, which highlights the limitation of the human form, is still a fundamental component in contemporary art in the twenty-first century. The history of the fragmented body is not only the history of an antithetical relationship between the fragment and the whole body, but also the history of the unavoidable connections between these contrasting ways of thinking about the human body (Mirzoeff, N. 1995: 4 and 28). Indeed, to speak of body fragmentation and dislocation is to tell a story, an action, and to evoke at the same time, a narrative of totality, implying by relation, the whole (Hillman, D and Mazzio, C. 1997, xii). Stefanie Wenner also argues that body fragmentation

the idealized nude male youth” (Hall, D. 1992: 22) is still a major benchmark of aesthetic accomplishment in the western hemisphere. As Ruth Barcan states, “...the West has inherited the association of male athleticism with virtue, beauty and heroic manliness from the Greeks” (Barcan R. 2004: 227). This association between the look, the outside of the body and ‘morality’ is highly problematic, as it reinforces the binary opposition of beautiful-healthy and virtue with diseased-unmoral.
¹⁵ Caterina Albano locates the spreading of the “rhetoric of anxiety and fear” through words and images at the very end of the nineteenth century, however for her anxiety does not have to be necessarily connected to a ‘real’ or perceived external danger, but may also be the result of a heightened vulnerability to “internal angst” (Albano, C. 2012: 13-14).

and wholeness always form an oppositional binary. In her view, without any previous concept of body unity that can be threatened and lost through dismemberment, the idea of the body in pieces would not have a discernible meaning. The fragment will always remain a body part torn apart from an original, which constituted its unity (Wenner. S. 2001: 339-380).

A number of recent theorists have pointed out the impossibility of reaching ‘wholeness’, as the self is always extended through the inclusion of external objects, which function as a prosthetic extension of the senses. With this incorporation of objects, the self will reach beyond the known boundaries of the body; the skin. For this reason, one could argue that both sides of the body, the physical and the imaginary, will always be evoked in every representation of it, constantly challenging boundaries in relation to the ‘self’. The ‘wholeness’ of the body is not exclusively material, tangible and physical, but has always had an invisible immaterial side, which forms the body, but leaves the concept of the body open. The boundaries of the ‘whole’ body are shifting and subtle, constantly incorporating new bits and pieces of the world, rendering ‘wholeness’ unachievable (McLuhan, M. 1994:123-124; Scarry, E, 1998: 85-97; Merleau-Ponty, M. 2012: 143, 145)

4.3 Berlinde De Bruyckere: The 2000s

De Bruyckere’s interest in the body coincides with the increased interest in the 1990s in the exploration of bodily boundaries. In the late 1990s, Berlinde De Bruyckere created figures made of wax covered in layers of used woollen blankets, which are also called the ‘blanket-women-series’ (image 4-9). As the artist remarked:

I’m still busy with the same themes and forms, geometric and masculine. I made cages, which I still find very strong. There is continuity in my work: the cage works treated the same themes, which are important for me now. The difference is that the iron cage has been replaced by a human body (Gnyp, M. 2010).

The choice of the word “replace” in this context is interesting, as she could have just said “I moved on from iron cages to bodies”. The word “replace” has somehow the connotation that for her there are similarities between a cage and the body. Nietzsche too, interprets the body as a cage, and the bars as suggesting the existential imprisonment typical of “the phenomenology of the human condition” (Aloi, G. 2012: 55).



4-9: **Berlinde De Bruyckere**, 2005, blankets, wax, polyester, metal tub.
Installation view, Maison Rouge, Paris, France

In De Bruyckere's sculptures and installations woollen blankets play an important role. Blankets do not only serve as a metaphor for the vulnerability of the body, as a blanket can offer shelter and smother at the same time, but they also offer the opportunity to hide from the world outside and to avoid the viewer's gaze (Ruyter, M. 2004: 227). Additionally, De Bruyckere's 1990's 'blanket women', (image 4-9) could be positioned in contrast to the hyper sexualisation of the female body in the media and art worlds.

4.4 Transitional Objects

Whilst De Bruyckere pursued the theme of the 'Blanket-Women' (1999), her figures morphed into a more fragmentary abstract state, (image 4-10). The figures started to miss legs, arms, toes, and the soft blankets, instead of just functioning as a protection layer, were sewn into the bodies, taking over the role of the skin, restricting and protecting the body at the same time (Ruyter, M. 2004: 228). As the artist states:

If you look at the wax pieces, they are all very fragile I put cushions in the pieces to protect them because they are so fragile. They become more human because I use the same colour as the skin of my human figures. Just to pay attention to the fragility, I use the cushions. The cushions come from our own history. We use blankets on the bed so they become part of us in our lives, (De Bruyckere, B. 2013 in Zhao. S.).



4-10: **Berlinde De Bruyckere**, *The Pillow*, 2010, wax, epoxy, iron, wool, cotton, wood, 90 x 70 x 60

Blankets may be part of our life as adults but could also bring us back to our childhood, a time when the blanket was a ‘transitional’ object. Psychoanalyst D. W. Winnicott introduces a transitional space in the process of separation between mother and child. Transitional objects, such as soft toys and blankets, which the child recognizes as ‘Not-Me’, populate this space and they stand in for the missing mother. De Bruyckere’s act of sewing blankets and bodies together may place her figures in this transitional zone, continuously re-enacting the anxiety of the formation of boundaries between inner psychic reality and the external world.

In De Bruyckere’s *Zonder Titel* (2002), (image 4-11), fabric and woollen blankets are stitched together to form fluffy toy animals. These soft toys, however, have been manipulated and joined together to form a continuous whole from fragments of different creatures. Through stitching together, the artist may emphasise their belonging together, their closeness and their unity.



4-11: **Berlinde De Bruyckere**, *Zonder Titel (Untitled)*, 2002, blankets, wood, iron, De Pont, Tilburg

The ‘creatures’, in *Zonder Titel* (images 4-11- and 4-12) for instance produced in 2002 and 2003, are reminiscent of the form and the materiality of the work of Bourgeois and Mike Kelley. These artists transform the materiality and shape of soft toys into something unsettling and disconcerting, awakening childhood’s feelings, fears and memories.



4-12: **Berlinde De Bruyckere**, *Zonder Titel*, bioscoopstoelen, collage van stof en wollen dekens, 2003.

Between 9th of June and 11th of November 2013, De Bruyckere’s artwork was presented in an exhibition at the Palais des Papes in Avignon, under the heading of “Les Papesses”, alongside the work of four other female artists; Camille Claudel (1864 – 1943), Louise Bourgeois, Kiki Smith and Jana Sterbak (1955-). Eric Mezil, curator of this exhibition and director of the

collection Lambert, in choosing the title ‘Les Papesses’ for the exhibition, creates a link between the myth of Pope Joan and the role of women sculptors in contemporary art. The legend, which is connected with the fear of the arrival of the anti-Christ, tells the story of Joan, a German woman of English descent, who disguised as a man, became Pope of the Catholic Church and died giving birth prematurely during a procession (Baring-Gould. S: 2012: 95-96). The myth was then connected to another rumour contending that even today, after the new Pope has been elected, he is made to sit on the ‘Porphyry’ chair to prove his maleness and to avoid the mistake to appoint another woman to a role predestined for a man (Thomson, N. et al. 2011).

By calling these five artists ‘Les Papesses’, the curator transforms successful female artists into ‘Papesses’, or females disguised as men and taking over a role predestined to men. The curator may have intended to describe these five artists as high priestesses of contemporary art, but their comparison with Joan, ‘La Papesse’, may point to a different connotation. This association perpetuates the idea that successful women artists are the few exceptions to the rule and with success they become part of the male world, leaving behind womanhood and with it, all other women.

Re-writing art history by including a few women artists as ‘Papesses’, as exceptions, still perpetuates the exclusion of the essential contribution of feminism and feminist artists in contemporary art discourses. The same process of exclusion is often found in the debates on ‘materiality’. As explained in the ‘Papesses’ exhibition’s documentation “the tradition of sculpture is often said to be the most difficult of practices - the most traditional – marble, terracotta, plaster, bronze, wax and contemporary – sewn fabrics, glass, ceramic, papier mâché, etc” (Collection Lambert Avignon, 2013). With this automatic shift from traditional to contemporary materials, the contribution of female artists in introducing materials and processes previously considered ‘craft’ into art is written out of history. Interestingly, when men produce artwork with methods and materials, such as sewn fabric, glass, ceramic and papier mâché traditionally seen as feminine, the meaning and connotation of both material and process undergo a shift and lose the connection to craft. Associating established female artists and their use of alternative materials to ‘the Papesse factor’ could then be interpreted as a re-writing of art-history, but one that excludes the important contribution of feminism and feminist art history.

De Bruyckere, along with many other contemporary artists, has been influenced by the legacy of feminist art that emphasised content, context and interaction with the viewers, and

by the aesthetic developed by female artists before her. Their influence, however, is not limited to subject matter and interaction with art institutions and viewers, but also included very much the shift in the choice of materials and the way these materials were used, (Moszynska, A. 2013: 8-11). Artists, such as Judy Chicago, Miriam Shapiro (1923-2015) and Faith Ringgold (1930-), concerned with feminist issues embraced alternative materials, incorporating fabric, fibres, ceramic to name but a few, as these materials did not have the same historically male-dominated precedent as painting and sculpture. Judy Chicago, to celebrate women's heritage, used ceramic and embroidery to create her *Dinner Party* (1974-79). By using these non-traditional media, feminist artists invested these materials not only with ritual, religious and symbolic meaning but also social and political functions, influencing deeply the next generations of artists. Even though, in more recent art historical books, female artists have been added alongside their fellow male artists, the contribution of feminist artists, curators and art historians in shaping the contemporary art practices has often been omitted. One could also argue, that the aesthetic achievements of female and feminist artists have become part of the artistic language and, therefore, one should not be surprised that contemporary artists, who utilise these forms and materials, are unaware of these influences.

Louise Bourgeois is a source of inspiration for many contemporary artists and she also provides an interesting example of this 'unconscious' and often un-mentioned connection to the previous generations of female artists. Bourgeois, one of the five 'Papesses' in the Avignon exhibition discussed above, with her experimentations and use of innovative materials, has deeply influenced the work of the next generation of female artists and as Briony Fer observes "her resonance continues to be intensely felt in the work of any number of artists" (Fer, B. 1999: 27). Bourgeois does not "believe that there is a feminist aesthetic. Loads of the emotions I express in my work", she said, "are pre-gender" (Bourgeois, L. in Morris, S. 2007: 131). Nevertheless, her work informed the growing feminist art movement in the 1970s and continues to influence feminist-inspired work and installation art today. Bourgeois' artwork has been widely researched and re-interpreted and has been positioned in a surrealist, neo-dada and feminist context. Mignon Nixon highlights the artist's importance in shaping the connection between feminism and modern art. She defines

Bourgeois' art as participating in the history of feminism and psychoanalysis, as well as in the history of modern art. For if feminism is a movement "that has been shadowing psychoanalysis since its inception," in modern art it is the work of Louise Bourgeois that has borne most active and abiding witness to their complex interaction" (Nixon, M. 2005: 3).

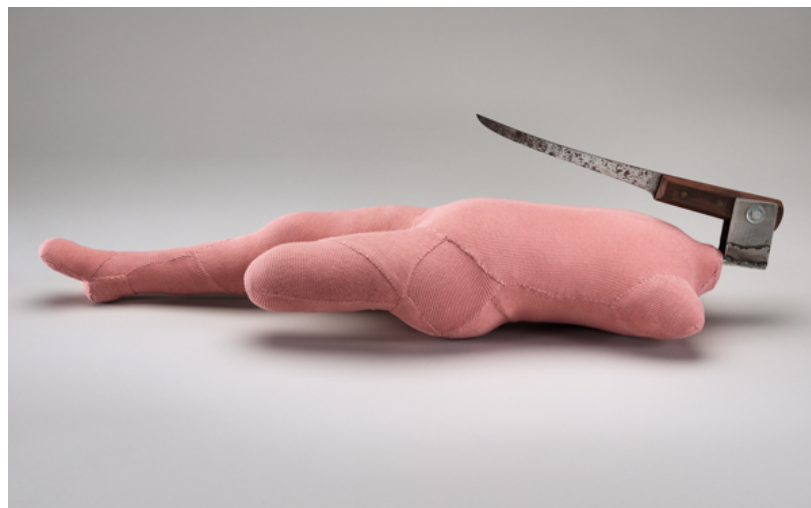
De Bruyckere, like many contemporary artists, has adopted many of the aesthetic practices developed by female artists before her. De Bruyckere's materiality and displaying mode, her theme of the cages, as well as suspending the figures on wire, are in fact, reminiscent of the late artwork of Bourgeois. Both artists have an intense interest in biomorphic forms and for the human body, which they represent as fragmented and deformed, reminding the audience of the vulnerability and ephemerality of human life.

In the last chapter, I have shown how the memory of the sense of touch can inform the understanding of De Bruyckere's artworks, and how materials constitute an essential component in the process of tactile perception. Bourgeois often combined materials such as latex or liquid rubber with the casting process to create objects that would imitate the skin (Fer, B. 1999: 32). In the 1960s she experimented with several materials such as plaster, resin, latex, plastic and wax to find a combination of form and material that could convey emotional states such as fear, compulsion, guilt, aggression, and withdrawal. As the artist explains "traditional materials limit, where plaster, hot glue, rubber, latex, and plastic are the salt of pushing ahead into new concerns" (Bourgeois, L. in Morris, F. 2007: 174).

The materiality of Bourgeois' sculptures can both engage the body of the viewers and act as bodily metaphors within the sculptures themselves. Especially in her sewn and stuffed sculptures, the artist takes advantage of the spectators' tactile associations. In the 1990s, Bourgeois began to incorporate fabric materials from her life, such as towels, linens, bed sheets, and clothes into her work (Hodge, B. in Morris, F. 2007: 120). These objects made of fabric sewn together are attributes of time, of people and places and contain and embody memories. Bourgeois' *Knife Figure* (2002) image (4-13), for instance, is made of fabric roughly stitched together, giving prominence to the seams that suggest scars. The naked, one-legged body of this female figure lies powerless under the knife that may just have decapitated her. Where does this violence come from? Does the knife represent the outside and therefore the violence inflicted to the female body or does the knife take on the role of the figure's head and suggest self-destruction? The contrast between the softness of the warm pink fabric and the roughness of the cold surface of the axe seems to visually re-create the dynamic of a tactile exploration and highlights the contradiction between vulnerability and aggression at work in this sculpture. In the *Knife Figure* (2002), threat, mutilation and violation have been translated into fabric, the tactile material that is often associated with soft toys. The connection of soft toys with the haptic memories of our childhood indicates that despite being presented within a curatorial context these fabric sculptures "cannot be distanced as objects" and instead "they

only gain legibility as vital and present meditations of an insistent subjectivity”. Robinson, in fact, points out that whereas the bronze sculptures can be situated “safely in the realm of art”, the gesture and methods of production of the fabric figures “are at the furthest remove from those high art practices” (Robinson, H. 2006: 144). Soft toys, which often function as transitional objects, can stand in for the missing mother. Bourgeois’ act of sewing pieces of fabric bodies together may place her figures in a transitional zone, in which the anxiety of the formation of boundaries between inner psychic reality and the external world is continuously re-enacting.

This process of cutting and stitching together has often been connected to Bourgeois’ identification with her mother, who was a tapestry restorer in the family business. However, the intentional rough handiwork points to the ambivalent desire to dispose of her past and at the same time to incorporate it through the materials connected to it (Nochlin, L. in Morris, F. 2007: 191). In this context the act of joining through sewing can be seen as a symbolic action to express the desire to re-visit the past in order to find reconciliation. Moreover, Bourgeois’ figures are often stuffed to the brink and are laid out without protection on the floor, drawing attention to the precariousness of their seams. Similarly, as will be seen in chapter seven, the seams in De Bruyckere’s figures always seem to be on the verge of bursting open, exposing the ‘interiority’ of the body. The seams, a constant and visible reminder of scars and wounds, become an important visual trope used to communicate physical and psychic pain, providing the artist with a well-established visual language with which to convey existential and emotional issues.



4-13: **Louise Bourgeois:** *Knife Figure*, 2002, fabric, steel and wood, 22.2 x 76.2 x 19.1cm

Comparing image (4-13) with image (4-14), it becomes evident that fabric as material and the process of sewing the different parts together, but leaving the seams visible to draw attention to the sculptural process, is another similarity between Bourgeois and De Bruyckere. In her later work, Bourgeois used fabric widely to awaken the tactile sensations in spectators. Lorna Collins, reflecting on Bourgeois' 'Seven in a Bed' (2001), maintains that "in looking one desires to touch, and seeing becomes a different kind of perception, rather like squashing and fondling, just as those figures act out in front of me" (Collins, L. 2010: 51).

De Bruyckere, with both materials, fabric and wax, employs a similar tactic in order to engage the viewer on an affective level.¹⁶ In *Wezen* (2003/04) the spectators' sensorial experience is activated through the combination of the casting process and wax, which reproduces very accurately the 'lived body'. These memories, which involve the haptic, may encourage viewers to search beneath the surface, where body language and tactile language meet to convey emotions.



4-14: **Berlinde De Bruyckere**, *Wezen*, 2003/04, wax, blankets, wood, iron, epoxy, 95 x 49 x 65 cm

Bourgeois sculpture *Seven in Bed* (2001) image (4-15) presents a row of seven pink fabric dolls with ten heads roughly sewn together. The figures squeeze together in a gigantic embrace on top of a white bed. These fabric figures may look like a child's toy or an object created by a child by sewing together pieces of fabric with imprecise stitches or "furnishings, dressmaking, patchwork [and] make-do-and-mend, of an activity passed from mother to daughter" (Robinson, H. 2006: 144). However, the position of the bodies, the way the bodies

¹⁶ For a discussion on the fabric and wax materiality in Berlinde De Bruyckere see chapter three.

are stuck close together and the double heads of some of the bodies may cause uncanny feelings in the viewer.

Furthermore, the work itself is encased within a steel and glass vitrine ‘like a museum specimen’ which is situated at eye level, and therefore the potential for tactility seems to be negated by the presence of a physical barrier between the viewer and the work.



4-15: **Louise Bourgeois**, *Seven in a Bed*, 2001, fabric, stainless steel, glass and wood

Many of De Bruyckere's figures, similarly to Bourgeois' *Seven in Bed* (2001), and *Couple IV* (1997) (image 4-16), are protected, contained and distanced from the viewers by a glass cabinet, preventing them from touching or getting too close to the works. This barrier does not only emphasise the fragility of the presented objects, but may also provide distance from the viewer and potentially, a defence mechanism. Moreover, the glass cabinet can be interpreted as a kind of enclosure for the object, a forced home, and a prison, which recalls the theme of the cells from Bourgeois and of the cages from De Bruyckere. Displaying the sculpture behind a protection layer may also symbolically refer to an object of commercial or sentimental value. However, as Hilary Robinson notes, even the glass vitrines do not prevent viewers from feeling “a disquiet, almost an embarrassment in this encounter” as the fabric piece does not benefit from the “distancing mechanism” which operates with other materials (ibid 144).



4-16: **Louise Bourgeois**, *Couple IV*, 1997, fabric, leather, stainless steel and plastic, 50.8 x 165.1 x 77.5 cm.
wood and glass, Victorian vitrine: 182.9 x 208.3 x 109.2 cm.

The *Couple IV* (1996) presents a man and a woman made of black fabric implicitly suggesting the sexual act. According to Bourgeois, the above sculpture refers to sex as well as the infidelities of her father and her personal relationship to her own family. For the artist there is:

...a fatal attraction not towards one or the other, but to the phenomena of copulation ... I am exasperated by the vision of the copulating couple, and it makes me so furious ... that I chop their heads [off]. This is it ... I turn violent. The sewing is a defence. I am so afraid of the things I might do. The defence is to do the opposite of what you want to do (Bourgeois, L. in Morris, F. and Bernadac, M. 2007: 92).

The figures are raw and primitive and the female figure is wearing a prosthetic leg, suggesting that she is incomplete and wounded. The prosthesis, which permits the functioning of the 'lived body', is also symbol of the "disabling existential experiences and traumas that prevent the normal functioning of the body and the mind" (Wall, S. L in Morris, F. 2007: 226). The absence of the head, in image (4-16) also points to the

primordial animal desire that underpins sexual relationships and the physical and psychic dependence and need for the desire of the other.

In the sculpture *Into One Another III to P.P.P* (2010), De Bruyckere uses a similar form to express the contrasting feelings that the physical and emotional dependence with the 'other' may cause. She shows that people are joined to each other physically and emotionally. The bodies, in this sculpture, are joined together, indicating that being attached to someone psychologically and emotionally always involves dependency. This dependency, which on one side may give a sense of security and belonging, is also crippling and can trigger anxiety.



4-17: **Berlinde De Bruyckere**, *Into One Another III To P.P.P*, 2010, wax, epoxy, iron, wood, glass

The analogies between Bourgeois and De Bruyckere are not limited to the formal aspects of their work, as both artists' work has been interpreted as existentialist. Bourgeois herself admitted her dislike for the surrealists and saw herself as an existentialist (Morris, F. 2007: 285, 117). Bourgeois figurative sculptures best capture the existentialist spirit, in which the individual has to constantly struggle in isolation. In her artwork, often inspired by her

childhood, she expresses both her own state of mind and also the ever recurring themes connected to human relations, communication and the suffering they inevitably involve. De Bruyckere presents humanity as alienated, solitary and lost. Many of her figures, such as *Marthe* (2008) (image 5-1) and *Jelle Luippard* (2004-2005) (image 6-14), stand in contrast to the solidity and permanence of a bronze sculpture. The figures are thin; the body is often unnaturally elongated, featureless, with a rough and agitated surface.

4.5 The Animal Body

For a work on the theme of war, commissioned by the In Flanders Fields Museum, De Bruyckere presented an installation entitled; *In Flanders Field* (2000), (image 4-18), composed of five life size horse casts covered in real horse skin. The massive horses are immobilized in their fall to death. Their legs stretched out on the ground or towards the sky amplify the sculpture's dramatic force. The horses, victims of the war, have lost all their natural strength and perfection.



4-18: **Berlinde De Bruyckere**, *In Flanders Fields*, 2000, horse skin and hair, iron, epoxy

This installation reflects the fact that during the First World War, both soldiers and horses were slaughtered near the museum.¹⁷ Whilst researching World War I in the museum's archive, the artist came across many images of streets and battlefields 'littered' with dead

¹⁷ The museum is in the town of Ypres, site of a famous First World War battle.

horses, which could have been similar to the photograph below (image 4-19), depicting the bodies of horses laying lifeless on the floor next to the cart they were pulling. These photographs taken near Menin Road in Ypres in 1917 inspired De Bruyckere to arrange the horses in her sculpture in this particular form (image 4-18) (Ruyters, M. 2002: 228).



4-19: *Dead Horses*. Menin Road, Ypres 1917

There is a long tradition of using the shape of the animal carcass to convey human feelings. Flesh, both human and animal, dominates De Bruyckere's artwork and the artist agrees that her childhood memories of seeing dead animals, body parts and blood in her father's butcher shop have certainly played "a big role in her consciousness" (Gnyp, M. 2010). However, while looking at animal meat, it is impossible to avoid noticing the similarity between animal and human flesh. Flesh is where the animal and the human are visually indistinguishable, as colour and texture overlap. For this reason, animal meat can take on a variety of meanings, when used as a medium in contemporary art. In 1987, for instance, Jana Sterbak created *Vanitas: Flesh Dress for an Albino Anorectic*, a dress made of red meat, which was salted to naturally undergo the curing process. Sterbak attached the steak to a mannequin and fashioned it into the form of a dress to show the contrast between vanity and bodily decay. In 1989 Jannis Kounellis (1936-), whose work has been associated with Arte Povera, presented 'rows of carcasses hung in front of iron panels' (Aloi, G. 2012: 53-54). Marina Abramovic (1946-), in 1997, made *Balkan Baroque* in response to the War in Bosnia, (1992-95). During the performance at the Venice Biennale in 1997, Abramovic spent four days taking off the meat

and cleaning 1500 cow bones in front of an audience. As the artist commented:

It was summer in Venice, the smell of bones was unbearable. The whole idea of washing bones is impossible. You can't wash the blood from your hands, as well as you can't wash the shame from the war" (Petrovic, M. (2012).

In 2002, Zhank Huan (1965-), in his performance in New York, walked down Fifth Avenue dressed with fresh meat. In 2004, Marc Quinn (1964-) produced bronze casts of carcasses of various animals for his exhibition 'Flesh'.

To represent death and suffering caused by war on a massive scale De Bruyckere favours the use of the massive body and flesh of horses, as according to her the enormous suffering during wars can only be conveyed through the horse's larger physical form. The fragmented bodies of horses draw attention to and translate visually the emotions at the heart of war, like fear, anger, loss and loneliness (Stephen, A. June 2012). In her installation, *In Flanders Fields* (2000), the five life size horses are immobilised during their fall to death, transcending their physicality to communicate human emotions.



4-20: **Berlinde De Bruyckere**, *Inside Me*, 2008-2010,
cast iron, horse skin, epoxy, iron, wood
328.7 x 244.5 x 126.5 cm / 129 3/8 x 96 1/4 x 49 3/4 in

In other horse sculptures, such as *Inside Me* (2010), (image 4-20), De Bruyckere puts emphasis on particular body parts, transforming the body of this powerful animal into a weightless, shattered creature. In other sculptures, the bodies of several horses are combined in order to create one single ‘being’; their bodies fused together, their contorted limbs conveying unfamiliar feeling of animation. This merged state draws attention to the fact that both the status quo, with its lack of individual freedom, and the separation by ripping the bodies apart with an act of force, will inflict suffering. This forced togetherness and the knowledge of a possible painful separation, in both animals and humans (image 4-21), may contribute to causing contrasting emotions in the spectators.

4.6 Beyond the Single Body

The presence of body parts in De Bruyckere’s sculptures, aims at capturing the complexity of human beings, as well as placing subjectivity in correlation with social and cultural factors. In her installation; *Eén* (2003-2004), (image 4-21), the body fragments seem to grow out of each other or flow into each other to form a new whole (Hauser & Wirth, 2004). Indeed, De Bruyckere does not consider human beings as a static assemblage of physical components, as the various fragments converge together to form a new unity. This whole, however, is never static or finished; in fact, human beings are not only flesh, but they are shaped through their memories. Nonetheless, the fragments of memories to which we hang on today, may lose importance or even be forgotten in the future (Gnyp, M. 2010). The subject's memories and the ‘bodies’ in her sculptures are constituted by signs that ‘re-member the lost body part’, and thus, like fetishes, affirm absence by their presence.¹⁸

Indeed, an innumerable number of events and encounters concur to form and shape every individual, and as Berlinde De Bruyckere states; “human beings are also made of parts of others” (ACCA, 2012). Accepting the fact that we are also made of parts of others, may involve dealing with a subjectivity, which expands beyond the subject itself to include otherness within.

Even though we know that the DNA in a real human’s body part contains the information of the whole body, visually the body fragment provides only bits of information; the constructed or imagined whole cannot assume the position of the ‘real’ and only whole, not only because the concept of the ‘real’ body is highly questionable, but also because every

¹⁸ For a discussion of the notion of presence and absence in Berlinde De Bruyckere’s artworks see chapter five.

viewer will imagine it differently, creating in this way, the possibility of a multiple of 'wholes'.



4-21: **Berlinde De Bruyckere**, *Eén*, 2003-2004, was, hars, metaal, 2 vitrinekasten
1: 250 x 195 x 90 cm 2: 249 x 194,5 x 93,5 cm

It is this property and power of the 'visual synecdoche' that may inspire De Bruyckere, to use only a segment of the human figure. Viewers are then obliged to become active participants, filling in the blank spaces in the narrative left by the body part, extending the possible interpretations to infinity. The multitude of personal interpretations may seem to contrast my argument that Bruyckere's figures can convey a 'shared humanity'. Even if we agree that the artist represents her very particular point of view, which may not necessarily engage everybody in the same way, it is nevertheless, possible to argue that her artworks, through subject matter, form, materials, sculptural process, and presentation contribute to the enhancement of the spectators' bodily involvement and, therefore, might resonate on an emotional level with many spectators.

4.7 Space and Time

De Bruyckere's work can be understood as an on-going debate between the past and the present from a social, political, and art historical point of view. For Jameson, postmodernism often involves the "disappearance of a sense of history" and the "fragmentation of time into a series of perpetual presents" (Jameson, F. in Hal Foster, 1998: 144). His argument may be

interpreted as concluding a lack of historical connections and, therefore, preventing the possibility of political activism in a postmodern society. However, contrary to what Jameson contends, this thesis will argue that the artwork of De Bruyckere is not only engaged with history through quotations and references, but it can also appear as a political and social tool. Does this imply that her work will have to be situated outside ‘postmodernism’? Or can the postmodern aesthetic act as an effective means of political and social critique?

De Bruyckere beautifully illustrates this debate between past and present, as she frequently shows her sculptures, alongside ‘old masters’, or in unexpected juxtapositions with filmmakers, poets or old found photographs, without compromising on social and political content.¹⁹ In 2009 (image 4-22), she presented her sculptures alongside two paintings of Luca Giordano: ‘Saint Bartholomew and Prometheus Bound’, both believed to have been painted around 1660. The realisation that style, subject matter and display mode may be a citation, shifts the meaning of the entire work and may change the way the artwork is perceived.



4-22: **Berlinde De Bruyckere.** *We Are All Flesh*, 2009, wax, wood, iron, epoxy, installation view.

¹⁹ For a detail discussion on De Bruyckere’s references see chapter six.

For Martha Buskirk, inviting contemporary artists to work in a specific space and allowing them to access their permanent collection to create a temporary exhibition, has to be interpreted as a type of indirect ready-made. The painting as ready-made is imbued with new meaning through re-contextualisation and juxtaposition with contemporary artwork (Buskirk, M. 2005: 171). The museum and its collection, then, acquires the role of ‘source of inspiration’, and the contemporary artist, through her choices and arrangements, may draw attention to different aspects of past knowledge and art history. Of course, the juxtaposition of old masters and contemporary artwork is not a new one. In fact, during the 1980s and 1990s, the practice of inviting artists not only to create ‘site-specific’ artwork, but also to use or be inspired by the museum’s collection, became a mainstream event (ibid: 178).

Moreover, De Bruyckere, in contrast to minimalist artists of the late 1960s who abolished the plinth in order to highlight the external context of the artwork and how the artwork interacted with the world, prefers to present her sculptures on a base or pedestal.²⁰ The pedestal, which detaches the sculpture from the site, may point towards a return of modernist sculpture with its indifference to site (Kwon, M. 1997: 85).²¹ However, in De Bruyckere’s work, rather than functioning as a separation between surrounding and sculpture, the base may be seen as being part of the sculpture and enhancing the connection between viewer and object.

The base of most of De Bruyckere’s sculptures is made of second hand objects, antique furniture or soft furnishing: all objects which have had a previous life. The finding, collecting, safekeeping and finally, re-use of these old objects, becomes part of the artistic process. The base and the sculpture are combined to form a new symbiotic togetherness and, therefore, cease to exist as two separate entities. Nevertheless, these found objects, although an integral part of the artwork, may still be seen as carrying information about their previous lives,

²⁰ The passage from modernism to postmodernism in visual art coincides with a profound cultural revision of values, concepts and forms, which have influenced what may be considered to be a work of art. This transition, during the 1960s, caused an accentuation of the importance of display method and context, in which the artwork was presented (Kraus, R. 1979: 34; Buskirk, M. 2005: 165). Krauss describes modernism as the ‘rupture’ between sculpture and its location, where ‘modern sculpture’ is seen as autonomous from its surrounding space and, therefore, dependent exclusively on the medium and its formal nature. As Krauss claims, this loss of connection between place and sculpture marks the entrance into “modernism, since it is the modernist period of sculptural production that operates in relation to this loss of site” (Krauss, R. 1979: 34). The “fetishization of the base” during the modernist period, played an essential role in detaching the sculpture from its surroundings, making it possible to present it in different places without loss of meaning (ibid: 34).

²¹ Unlike traditional sculpture, which was displayed upon a plinth, artists belonging to the minimalist’s movement tended to reject the plinth and placed their work on the floor or propped against the wall of the gallery (Schultz, D. 2007: 92). As Hal Foster contends, “with minimalism sculpture no longer stands apart, on a pedestal or as a pure art, but is repositioned among objects and redefined in terms of place. In this transformation the viewer, refused the safe, sovereign space of formal art, is cast back on the here and now; and rather than scan the surface of a work for a topographical mapping of the properties of its medium, he or she is prompted to explore the perceptual consequences of a particular intervention in a given site” (Foster, H. 1996: 39).

showing that the history of these antique objects may still be latently present and able to influence the reading of the whole work. As Berlinde De Bruyckere explains:

Even when I use old furniture, textiles and used materials, there was a beauty in that for me because these objects had a history. Very often I feel like I am working with the idea of curation. I collect a lot of plinths and branches, then at a certain moment I bring them into the studio to become part of a sculpture. It is not that they aren't objects on their own, or that I first make my sculpture and then afterwards I put them on a plinth (De Bruyckere, B. 2012 in Burley, I.)

4.7.1 Site Specificity as Content

For most viewers in the West, De Bruyckere's sculptures tap into their memory and knowledge, not only through her many references to Christian iconography, old masters, and the use of materials, but also in the way in which she displays them. Subject matter and form seem to develop in parallel with the materials and exhibition mode she uses, questioning body politics through a set of persistent themes, whilst at the same time, challenging the viewers' perception of space.

Interestingly, the introduction of the concept of time in the sculptural production process, discussed in the last chapter, is also reinforced by the way in which the sculptures are combined and displayed in space. Similar to the multi-layered creation process and signification in her artwork, the way in which she presents the artwork takes advantage of several different approaches to display. This section, therefore, aims to address how the way De Bruyckere's artwork is presented, highlights the links between context and the exhibited work. Particular attention will be devoted to the tensions that may arise from the interactions between site-specificity, the way the artwork is organised within the space, re-contextualisation of it, and the viewer.

De Bruyckere, in her many commissioned exhibitions, engages deeply with the space, its surroundings and its historical background. By deliberately raising the viewers' awareness of both the physical and cultural details of the exhibition setting, her site-specific installations emphasise contingency in the formation of the work's meaning. Moreover, this dialogue between site and the artwork may induce the spectators to feel part of the space, providing them with a multitude of perspectives and possible interpretations.²²

²² Site-specific art is often defined as an artwork that has been created for a particular place. The re-birth of site specificity in contemporary art can be connected with the need of artists in the late 1960s, to overcome the limits of gallery and museum spaces and to find alternative locations in which to exhibit their work (Moszynska, A. 2013: 194-195). In site-specific art, there is a shift in the formation of meanings from the objects toward the context. Meaning emerges from the inseparable

De Bruyckere, however, not only connects the artwork with the exhibition space, but she is also often concerned with the cultural heritage of the city for which the work is conceived. As seen above in 2000, for instance, when the war Museum in Ypres, invited De Bruyckere to create an exhibition on the theme of war, De Bruyckere was inspired by the sad history of the city: the site of a famous World War I battle (Coghlan, A. 2012).

While she was preparing the exhibition for ARTER, in Istanbul, De Bruyckere requested to exhibit some of her work in the ‘Çukurcuma Hammam’, a nineteenth century hammam in order to create a connection between the space, its architecture, the related cultural and historical past, and her own work.²³ The hammam is a public bathhouse, where people bath, relax together and take care of the body. One of the pieces exhibited in this space is *Actaeon* (2006), in which a young hunter is transformed into a deer upon seeing Diana bathing in the woods. The artist, by positioning the sculpture in the Hammam, draws attention to the act of cleansing the body and to Actaeon’s desire. In fact, Actaeon’s desire, an important theme in this work reflects the history of the hamam with its connotation to bodily pleasures. As the artist says:

For me it is of utmost importance to know for what kind of audience or in what kind of exhibition space I am making my work. Therefore, I designed all these works in the way that they can establish a dialogue with the exhibition space and with Istanbul (De Bruyckere, B. 2012 in Parlak, T).

By including specific historical references to the city or country in which the work has been commissioned, De Bruyckere expands her work to implicitly contain time, in the form of past events or history, as a further representational layer. The inclusion of the historical narrative in her artwork can be seen as functioning as an additional possible point of contact with the spectator. The way these fragments of information are presented in the work, contributes to the connections between historical events, objects or art belonging to different collections and the spectator’s personal memories and knowledge.

For instance, in 2013, during the preparation for the Venice Biennale, where she represented Belgium, she visited the location several times. The space and the historical and cultural background of the city had to be an integral part of the work. In fact, the artist wrote to the author J. M. Coetzee that:

connection between artwork, the site and the viewers’ presence (Kwon, M. 1997: 86). These connections have played an important role in challenging the modernist notion of an independent art object and drawing attention to the contingency of the artwork (Krauss, R. 1979: 32).

²³ This exhibition will be discussed in detail in chapter seven.

I prefer to work in layers, and there is one other aspect that I would like to include in the publication and that is the city of Venice as a historical place (De Bruyckere, B. 2013: 29).

To me it feels like I've been 'commissioned' to create a work for the pavilion; therefore, the space has become a very important aspect of the work. The link to the city is equally important; the city of Venice and its history are very much present (De Bruyckere, B. 2013 in Art Review).

Through the combination of site specificity and historical knowledge, De Bruyckere encourages the viewer to include time and space as important elements in the perception of her artwork, shifting attention from a static to a more dynamic way of 'looking' at the artwork.²⁴

De Bruyckere's artwork that has been created for a specific place, is often re-contextualised and re-presented in different spaces and cities. The question of what happens when artwork created for a determined place is then exhibited in different settings could be raised. Can this type of work still be described as site specific? Can we still apply Krauss' framework to understand De Bruyckere's work? Indeed, different viewpoints exist in the art world about whether the term site-specific should be limited to artwork produced for and exhibited permanently on the original site, or should be extended to works of art inspired by the encounter of a specific site.

Many new terms have emerged to describe artwork inspired by, responding to, or referencing a specific site. James Meyer, for instance introduces the concept of "functional sites", which describes site as a narrative influenced by the intervention of the artist (Kwon, M. 1997: 95). Miwon Kwon, noting the changes in sculptural practices of the 1980s and the 1990s, expands on Krauss' framework by adding alternative architectural and media spaces as well as social practices to the definition of site-specific-work. For him site-specificity is connected to knowledge and intellectual and cultural debates (Kwon, M. 1997: 92). De Bruyckere operates on a multiple definition of site. In fact, she has produced artwork for different museums and galleries, however, her consistent interest in themes concerning the human body, human loss and suffering can be interpreted as the 'site' or 'site of investigation' of her artwork. As Kwon states:

²⁴ Interpreting the new developments in art practice between the 1950s and the 1970s, Krauss writing about 'Land Art' points out how modernist fixation with aesthetic and form seemed to have plunged sculpture into a "double negative"; something defined as neither architecture nor landscape (Krauss, R. 1979: 34-38).²⁴

Emphasising the limiting nature of the boundaries set by the modernist model based on exclusion, she proposes an alternative model based on the positive terms obtained by defining what sculpture is instead of what sculpture is not (Krauss, R. 1979: 36-37). With this step she creates a frame in which it becomes possible to understand sculptural practice. Positioning sculpture between architecture and landscape, she highlights the fact that the form and meaning of the work is connected to the environment (Krauss, R. 1979: 41). In fact, this inclusion of the environment into sculpture has caused it to expand towards the cultural space.

In this way, different cultural debates, a theoretical concept, a social issue, a political problem, an institutional framework (not necessarily an art institution), a community or seasonal event, a historical condition, even particular formations of desire, are now deemed to function as sites (Kwon, M. 1997: 93).

Indeed, in De Bruyckere's practice, the site of physical action and the site of reception do not necessarily coincide. De Bruyckere's sites of intervention (Venice, the museum In Flanders Fields or ARTER), and her site of effect (the human condition), may be conceived as separate, especially when the work / installation is re-contextualised in a different space or city. However, one could safely argue that, the original site of intervention has influenced the creative process and the form of the final piece. De Bruyckere's artwork is in tune with the transformation in the art practice of the 1980s and 1990s, which has seen a shift from site specificity as a physical and geographical place, to a more 'conceptual', or more "discursive vector-ungrounded, fluid, virtual" place (ibid: 95). Of course, a looser definition of site-specific artwork makes its re-contextualisation easier, pointing to the needs of the art institutions and market, which would profit from a return of the autonomous and geographically transferable art object (ibid: 97-98).

This shift from 'sites of intervention' to 'sites of investigation' can be clearly noted in her international travelling solo museum exhibition entitled 'Mysterium Leib: Berlinde De Bruyckere in Dialogue with Cranach and Pasolini'. This exhibition, conceived as a traveling museum, was shown in the Mortizburg Foundation in Germany and Kunstmuseum in Bern, Switzerland in 2011. Additionally, in 2011, De Bruyckere presented 'Into One-Another to P.P.P.' (2010–2011), which was announced as "a foretaste of De Bruyckere's traveling solo museum exhibition". Described as a museum-exhibition, this installation places De Bruyckere's work into the category of 'museum collections'. Indeed, the human-like figures displayed in antique glass and wood vitrines, the labelling of the installation as a 'travelling museum', and the use of the casting technique, seem to connect De Bruyckere's artwork to the museum. Artwork exhibited in museums, like De Bruyckere's *Into One-Another to P.P.P.* (2010–2011), will become part of the museum's discourse and may be invested with a certain authority. This exhibition mode may produce tension and ambiguity between the artwork presented in the museum's premises and the discourse created by the museum's collection, which is believed to bear important and true information.

De Bruyckere's work seems to fit perfectly in a museum environment. Many of her fragmented figures, such as *Marthe* (image 5-1), are exhibited on plinths and in cabinets,

which further emphasises her interest in the figure as a specimen. Orderly and enclosed in cabinets, her sculptures invite the viewer to search for a rational organisation of information. Thinking about sculpture and the way it has been influenced by the conventional appearance of the cabinets it was displayed in, has clearly impacted on the ways in which De Bruyckere's sculptures are understood and presented. Although, the use of display cabinets could be interpreted as another kind of enclosure for the object or a prison, which recalls the theme of the cage discussed above, her use of the vitrine as a form of display, creates a link to the rational organisation of information that we inherited from the eighteenth century. The 'museographic' arrangement of the sculptures invites the spectator to look for a narrative; to connect the different objects displayed and conceive a story with a beginning and an end.

Additionally, displaying contemporary artwork in a museum alongside 'old masters' could also have the adverse effect of positioning artwork and the human suffering it aims to convey, in the past. The beauty and history of the surroundings may shift the emphasis from the contemporary and 'real' suffering of human beings to the realm of the formal.²⁵

Through the technique of casting and the museum-like presentation in vitrines of these fragments, De Bruyckere's figures become objects on display.²⁶ Displaying the bodies or body pieces in installation form, rather than as autonomous sculptures, reinforces this narrative.²⁷

Exhibiting different sculptures into an installation, however, does more than simply combine them, it curates the relationship that these figures can embody, and in so doing it is inviting the viewer to follow the spatial and temporal narrative created by the artist or curator. Moreover, installation as a display may also activate the dynamic of being part of the work, placing the body of the spectator inside the work and, therefore, possibly creating a stronger link between the lived body of the spectator and the represented fragmented bodies. Becoming part of and moving within the artwork, the viewer will develop awareness of the spatiality and physical boundaries of the installation (ibid: 18).

²⁵ See chapter six.

²⁶ The casting technique, which the artist extensively uses to create the body / body parts in her sculptures, has also been widely used by museums to copy and display artworks, and biological and botanical objects, in order to purvey knowledge to the general public. These collections of 'plaster casts', regarded as 'authentic substitutes', played a significant role in the way knowledge was formed and distributed in eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Kinkel, M. 2011: 7).

²⁷ The notion of installation emerged in the 1960s and 1970s, in opposition to the modernist tendency to isolate and stage the art object as autonomous and independent from its surroundings. The placement of sculptures within the installation context is believed to mark a significant shift in sculptural practice and viewer involvement (Potts, A. 2001a: 15). However, in order to understand the nature of this shift, it is paramount to emphasise the similarities between installation and previous modes of exhibiting sculptural work. Installations were not created in opposition to the category of sculpture, as the two were reworked in unison and the separation between these two different modes of presenting three-dimensional work is not always easily made (ibid: 11). Moreover, Potts considers the shift from single sculpture towards installation, a shift of "modality rather than a structural break" (ibid: 16), because installation art is a mode of production and display of artwork, rather than a movement.



4-23: **Berlinde De Bruyckere**, 2011, *Mysterium Leib*. Berlinde De Bruyckere im Dialog mit Cranach und Pasolini. Installation view, Kunstmuseum, Bern, 2011

In the installation, ‘Mysterium Leib’ (2011) at the Kunstmuseum Bern, for instance, De Bruyckere’s work is exhibited in museum-like vitrines. The cabinets form a barrier between the viewers and the artwork, preventing them from touching or getting too close to the work. This barrier emphasises the fragility, fragmentation and impermanence of the presented objects. This way of displaying the body and body pieces may encourage the viewer to negotiate the relationship of the different parts to the whole, plot internal narratives within the installation, as well as serving as a reminder of the way the body was exhibited in eighteenth century to display new knowledge. Indeed, sculpture obtains meaning not only through its status as objects and what it represents but also through the work as a whole, its location, its cultural or religious purpose and what it references.

Additionally, the physical closeness into which the viewer is forced when entering an installation may hinder the perception of the whole work with a single look, which may contribute to further fragmenting the viewers’ experience. This closeness between the artwork and the viewer, both in a physical-spatial and physical-mental way, could also be associated with the ‘intimate spaces’ that we, for various reasons, tend to protect. This ‘intimacy’ seems to be intrinsic in De Bruyckere’s sculptures of body parts. The body is our own very personal,

‘intimate space’ and De Bruyckere invades it in order to open a channel of communication with every spectator.

Sculptural body fragments exhibited in museums, however, were originally part of an integral body and found their meaning as part of the missing whole. In contrast, Berlinde De Bruyckere, like many other contemporary artists, is particularly concerned with the idea of the fragment, especially the body fragment, as an independent entity created with a conscious act.²⁸ As Friedrich Schlegel asserts, “Many works of the ancients have become fragments. Many works of the moderns are fragments at the time of their origin” (Schlegel, F. 1991: 21). Orderly and enclosed in cabinets, De Bruyckere’s sculptures invite us to search for a rational organisation of information. From a distance, her figures look like marble, which has the connotation of wealth and permanency, yet in choosing wax she puts life back into her sculpture. The colour suggests veins and arteries, while the fragility and possible disintegration of the material reflects the eventual corrosion of the body and the fleeting nature of life. Sally O’ Reilly sees in “the distressed patina” of De Bruyckere’s figures an allusion “to past atrocities that trouble our consciousness rather to confront us with the gore of fresh traumas” (O’ Reilly, 2009: 178). This thesis, however, in chapter six, will argue that De Bruyckere’s installations successfully create a connection between past and contemporary atrocities, showing that place and motives of violence may change, but the consequences and human suffering remain the same. De Bruyckere’s sculptures are inspired by real world encounters, combining in this way aesthetic with a more practical ethic that deals with actual events or problems.

De Bruyckere’s sculptures, as will be shown in detail in the next chapter, often originate from feelings of confrontation as well as from the awareness of the limits of the body. She shows the body as vulnerable, as the subject of suffering and inevitable mortality. For her, the impossibility of transcending the body makes it the best vehicle to visually express existential questions. “Taking the body as the departure point, I can refer to universal themes and put the body on a level with mankind” (De Bruyckere, B. 2010 in Gnyp, M.). The body becomes a container that holds violence, pain, suffering and ultimately death. It is an extension, “like you extend the intestines and it's fleshy and big and hard at the same time. There could be nothing from the human body inside yet it's talking about human feelings” (De Bruyckere, B. 2011 Maliszeski L.)

²⁸ Louise Bourgeois, Robert Gober (1954-), Lilla Lo Curto (1949-), William Outcault, Annette Messager (1943-), Rona Pondick, Kiki Smith, David Wojnarowicz (1954-1992), to name but a few.



4-24: **Berlinde De Bruyckere**, *Inside Me II*, 2011, wax, epoxy, wood, rope, cloth, wool, iron, installation view, 'Into One-Another To P.P.P.', Hauser & Wirth New York NY, 2011. Photo: Thomas Mueller

De Bruyckere, like Scarry, considers language an insufficient and inaccurate instrument with which to convey and share pain and suffering with other human beings. Her ultimate goal is to overcome this incommunicability of feelings, and to initiate a dialogue with the viewers on existential questions in order to ‘establish’ a shared language (Kulturfolger, 2011). A shared visual language “to communicate pain, suffering, loneliness, fear and death” could make the interaction between people easier and more intense (De Bruyckere, B. in Kathleen, B. 2011). The body fragment in her installations, like a magnifying glass (Adorno, T. 2005: 50), has the capacity and power to enhance awareness and involvement in the viewer, providing the artist with a highly malleable visual vocabulary for expressing multi-layered messages. The body part, as Mike Kelley observes, “becomes a kind of sentence that can be scrambled again and again to produce new meanings” with every new assembly (Kelley, M. 2004a). In De Bruyckere’s work, in fact, the fragment may be seen as plural. Although the incompleteness of the fragments introduces uncertainty and doubts in the interpretation, we nonetheless, feel compelled to assign a meaning to them, albeit one that can never be fixed. This uncertainty makes her work exciting and open to several interpretations. It ‘fragments things’, but also creates new opportunities for making connections between ‘fragments’ across time and

significant issues, and for creating new meanings. It could be like weaving different fragments through themes and time.

In De Bruyckere's installations, the body fragment does not only stand for damage and the passage of time, and does not only gain meaning through its relationship to the lost whole but most importantly the body fragment also suggests movement, change and uncertainty. In fact, the fragment can be interpreted as a synecdoche in which the remaining part replaces not only the whole body but also the whole story, introducing in this way movement in the artwork.

William Tronzo also sees movement and volatility in the fragment. It is this unpredictability, in his view, that renders fragments fascinating. Like shattered atoms the fragments "go off in all directions to perform spectacular acts of creation and destruction" (Tronzo, W. 2009: 2). This movement, however, is not totally predictable, as "fragmentation presumes an action whose result can never be entirely foreseen, in contrast to other, more deliberate forms of partitioning or division" (Tronzo, W. 2009: 1). Looking at the fragment as the result of an unforeseen and uncontrollable act of partitioning, a part left over, remaining from something that was there before may, to a certain degree, explain the negative connotations attributed to it. Of course, this negative association is increased when the fragments in question are parts of the human body, as the body fragment or body remnant is representative of our own mortality and frailty.

During the last decades, the body part has emerged as a powerful trace of the self.²⁹ Artists that started working with the fragmented body in the 1990s have been joined by a new wave of artists, such as De Bruyckere, using the body in pieces, which has been gaining prominence since 9/11 and the war in Iraq.³⁰ The body presented as fragmented may express preoccupation with mortality and present a dark view of humanity, but the missing body parts may also

²⁹ The Israel museum for instance opened (December 4, 2013-April 5, 2014) an exhibition curated by Tanya Sirakovich titled *Out of Body: Fragmentation in Art*. Although in the midst of the 200 works exhibited there are some archaeological artifacts, the exhibition focuses on work of art created as distinct part of the human body. 'Out of Body' focuses on works that were originally created as fragmented, exploring ways in which diverse cultures rendered aspects of the human body in different periods of time". The Israel museum (2013). Available from <http://www.imj.org.il/exhibitions/presentation/exhibit/?id=876> [Accessed 21.01.2014].

Between August 21, 2009 and February 28, 2010 The Menil Collection hosted an exhibition title: *Body in Fragments*, The Menil Collection, (2009). Past Exhibitions. Available from <https://www.menil.org/exhibitions/past> [31.12.2014].

In 2002-2003 Gunther von Hagens' exhibition, *Body Worlds* in the Atlantis Gallery raised not only many ethical questions about the origin and display of dead bodies, but also questioned the relationship between the body and selfhood. As Tessa Adams notes, Gunther von Hagens (1945-) managed to transform the final body fragmentation due to death into a durable object, creating in this way the "ultimate split object: a heroic figure dispensing its degrading fragmented flesh". These art objects are made possible solely through the total destruction of the 'real' represented human beings. Their absence, as biological beings, is the basis of their presence, "finally overcoming in death the fear of fragmentation that accompanied them during their life, and giving them the illusion of eternal wholeness" (Adam, T. 2012).

³⁰ Urs Fischer (1973-), Lucy Glendinning (1964-), Sophie Kahn, Francesco Albano, Joshua Vettivelu, Matteo Pugliese Tonu Matelli.

create a mental and physical space into which viewers could project themselves, where memories and personal body experiences play a crucial role in the understanding of the artwork.

To conclude; the question may be raised about whether the body fragment has not always been present, both in the unconscious and in art production, and that the only thing that has really changed is merely the disposition of people towards it. Like William Tronzo and Ian Balfour, I consider body fragmentation as being present in every ‘historical’ period. Fragments may go unseen, but, like many genetic mutations, are always already present, just waiting for the right environment to surface. Tronzo, for instance, considers the fragment to be a “powerful force reminiscent of the massive act of fragmentation at the beginning of time”, (the big bang) (Tronzo, W. 2009: 4). For Balfour, fragmentation has always already been present in every period, “either through a falsely totalised form that cannot sustain a harmonious tension between part and whole, or through a false presentation on an impossible whole outside the work of art” (Balfour, I in Tronzo, W. 2009: 88). James Elkins, too, moved away from his previous belief that during the “late twentieth century, art needed to dissect and reconfigure the body” and seems to attribute the invisibility of body fragmentation to “the blindness of history” (Elkins, J. in Baert, B. 2009: xii).

In this chapter, I have indicated that Berlinde De Bruyckere’s artwork is grounded in intense historical and cultural awareness. The image of the fragmented, multiple, and contradictory body in her installations, challenges authoritative discourses and cultural myths, referencing and quoting art, literature, photography and films from the ‘established’ culture, as well as ‘everyday objects’. Through the connection between past and contemporary art, she creates a link between past and present events, showing that place and motives of violence may change, but the human suffering always remains the same. The body parts in Berlinde De Bruyckere’s sculptures, place subjectivity in relation to psychological, political, and historical factors; questioning and extending what it means to be human. The body fragment in her artwork also suggests movement, change, uncertainty, and transcends boundaries, blurring the lines between humanity and nature, male and female, single and multiple, partial and whole, human and animal. The artist formulates open-ended questions to which the viewer is invited to reflect upon. Viewers, now active participants, are asked to fill in the spaces in the narrative left blank by the body part, and in doing so, extending the possible interpretations infinitely. Through the body fragment and the dialogue between her sculptures and the viewers, she

draws attention to the limitation of language to communicate physical and psychic suffering. Her ultimate goal is to overcome the incommunicability of feelings and 'establish' a shared language, in order to initiate a dialogue with the viewers on existential questions.

5 Linger on the Threshold: Ambiguity in the Work of Berlinde De Bruyckere

In the last chapter I have shown how De Bruyckere's figures mobilise several senses, initiating a physical, sensorial and often emotional engagement, which may temporarily precede the conceptual understanding of the artwork. This energy of the in-between creates 'immediate sensations' in the spectators that involve the haptic. Indeed, the first time I was faced with Berlinde De Bruyckere's artwork, I was struck by the forceful quality of its visceral 'unwholesomeness'. Immediately, I felt strangely drawn to it. *Marthe* (2008), (image 5-1), exhibited in the permanent collection at the Saatchi gallery, is a headless, disfigured female figure. Part-human and part tree; the wax sculpture stands on a bare and rough, white wooden plinth and seems to be walking out of an opened transparent display cabinet.



5-1: **Berlinde De Bruyckere**, *Marthe*, 2008, wax, epoxy, metal, wood and glass

Fleshy tree branches replace the missing head. The first impression is of flesh and branches suspended in a symbiotic relationship. This first idea is soon replaced by the uneasy feeling of

a parasitic dependence, in which body and branches are desperately struggling for control. *Marthe* (2008) appears to be pulling back, resisting this external force that drags her down. The branches instead aim for the ground, to grow roots in search of nutrients and stability. *Marthe* (2008) is a body in transition, a body whose internal war has become visible for all of us to see. *Marthe* (2008), the host, is losing control over her body and her flesh. The fleshy branches, slowly taking over, inflict pain and suffering. This figure inspired an incredible fascination in me. I returned several times to look at it, venturing closer and closer each time. My gaze shifted from the skin and twig like limbs to the opening in the body, searching the ‘inside’ for an answer.

De Bruyckere’s *Marthe* (2008), occupies a threshold and a space between presence and absence, between realism and imagination. It is the purpose of this chapter to examine De Bruyckere’s figures *Marthe* (2008), *Liggende I and II* (2012), and *Actaeon* (2012), in order to suggest that the fragmented human form in De Bruyckere’s sculptures, together with the imaginary power of transformation inherited from Ovid’s metamorphoses, concur to create an ambivalent psychological space, a void that cannot immediately be resolved by the viewers.

5.1 The Presence of Absence: The Uncanny

De Bruyckere’s death-like figures are hyper-realistic and impossibly contrived at the same time. They are composed of absences. Heads, innards and bones are missing, but as we have seen in chapter three, they refer to the ‘real’ body through form and the casting process. The transformation of the ‘familiar’ and recognisable body into a fragmented, ‘unfamiliar’ and distorted object, may trigger uncanny sensations in the viewer, provoking a suppressed primordial fear and causing intellectual uncertainty, repulsion and distress (Freud, S. 2003: 152, 153). De Bruyckere’s figures are indeed often introduced and described as “disturbing and uncannily lifelike”¹, or “creepy, uncanny sculptures”² that inspire “horror and pity in the

¹ See: http://www.timeoutbeijing.com/features/Blogs-Art_Blogs/19021/Review-Berlinde-De-Bruyckere-solo-exhibition.html; <http://www.accaonline.org.au/sites/default/files/BerlindeDeBruyckereEducationkit.pdf>; <http://galleristny.com/2012/11/berlinde-de-bruyckere-will-represent-belgium-at-the-2013-venice-biennale/>; <http://www.hauserwirth.com/exhibitions/203/berlinde-de-bruyckere-luca-giordano-we-are-all-flesh/view/>; <http://www.aestheticamagazine.com/blog/berlinde-de-bruyckere-hauser-and-wirth-outdoor-sculpture-london/#sthash.pWZPhzZJ.dpuf>; <http://www.theage.com.au/entertainment/art-and-design/works-born-of-bloodied-memory-20120601-1zmd6.html#ixzz2fi4eSOcH>.

² Russeth, A. (2012). Berlinde De Bruyckere Will Represent Belgium at the 2013 Venice Biennale. *Observer Culture*, 15 November 2012. Available from <http://galleristny.com/2012/11/berlinde-de-bruyckere-will-represent-belgium-at-the-2013-venice-biennale/> [Accessed 22 September 2013].

http://www.hanstheys.be/artists/berlinde_de_bruyckere/ [Accessed 23 September 2013].

viewer”.³ Created with extreme care and attention to detail, in painted wax designed to mimic the human skin, her sculptures intensify the Freudian sense of the uncanny through the deformation of the body, the absence of body parts and the presence of extra flesh where there should be none.

Viewers are drawn in by the seeming familiarity of her human and animal figures before finding themselves repulsed as deformity reveals itself and the creatures become suddenly monstrous, (Coghlan, A. 2012).

It is when the familiar world stops making sense that the uncanny appears and uncovers unfamiliar features in the ordinary and everyday. This disappearance of the known world makes new facets of it more visible, forcing the subjects to question what they know and hence, causing anxiety. Although the uncanny is not clearly definable, as it is always a personal experience (Freud, S. 2003: 124), the definition of the German word ‘unheimlich’, allows Freud to highlight and connect disparate events that could be considered uncanny, such as animism, magic and sorcery, the omnipotence of unintended repetition of thoughts, the double (ibid: 141), the castration complex, and instantaneous wish-fulfilment (ibid: 149).

In De Bruyckere’s sculptures wax and pigments are combined to give an unhealthy pallor and corpse-like quality to the figures, which accentuates the fragility and impermanence of the corporeal. These particular features produce strong emotional responses in the viewer who engages with her work. The transparency and thinness of the skin in *Marthe* 2008 (image 5-1) draws attention to the weak and unstable relationship between the interior and exterior boundaries of our body. The skin in *Marthe* (2008), although translucent and dead like, still carries signs of life such as veins and blood. *Marthe*’s aliveness contains the potential to create a connection with the ‘being alive’ of the viewer, rendering the relationship between *Marthe*’s body in the sculpture and the body of the viewer a shared feature rather than one of difference.

Praising the sculpted body for the illusion of representing ‘life’ has long been part of the art debate (Smith, R. 2010: 181; Walsh, M, 2013: 74).⁴ *Marthe* (2008), could be seen as supporting this discourse, not only for the qualities of its ‘life-like’ skin tones, but also

³For instance Thea Costantino writes: “The uncanny effect of De Bruyckere’s waxes is considerable; they inspire horror and pity in the viewer, who is confronted by an object that suggests the disquieting presence of a corpse”. (Costantino, T. (2013). Cripplewood at the Venice Biennale. *Dailyserving, An International Publication For Contemporary Art*, 20 August 2013. Available from <http://dailyserving.com/2013/08/cripplewood-at-the-venice-biennale/> [Accessed 23 September 2013].

⁴Contemporary artists such as Duane Hanson, Ron Mueck, Jamie Salmon, Evan Penny, Adam Beane and Sam Jinks create sculptures that appear alive. The details of the body are reproduced exactly down to the veins and the imperfections on the skin.

because it has been cast from a human being. The use of wax as material together with indexical nature of casting, with its physical connection between the sculptural body part, the trace, and its mode of inscription, may add to the uncanny feelings felt by the spectator when presented with De Bruyckere's work.⁵ Her fragmented human figures have the potential to unsettle our sense of whether something is real or fictional and maybe even, dead or alive. This similarity with the 'biological' body, as Robert Smith contends, "only intensifies its uncanny presence" (Smith, R. R. 2010: 181).

Freud's concept of the uncanny, which has fascinated both artists and art critics since the publication of his paper in 1919, has definitely maintained its significance for contemporary artists. In 2004, Mike Kelley curated the exhibition "The Uncanny", at the Tate Liverpool, where sculptural artifacts were presented in an extensive historical overview extending from ancient Egyptian funeral pieces to works of contemporary art.⁶ Each artist gave his/her personal formulation of the concept of 'the uncanny', through the use of different techniques like scale, materials, and colour.⁷

In his 1919 essay, Freud elaborated Ernst Jentsch's definition of the uncanny as being a product of "intellectual uncertainty" (Freud, S. 2003: 139), through aesthetic investigations, (ibid: 125). He contended that the uncanny confuses the real and imagined, the animate and inanimate, the subject and the other. As a consequence, one responds strongly to an uncanny experience. According to him, "the uncanny is ... everything that was meant to remain secret and hidden and has come into the open" (ibid: 132).

Of particular relevance for De Bruyckere's artwork, is Freud's observation that, amid the many meanings of 'heimlich'; from homelike and intimate, some of them come incredibly close to its antonym 'unheimlich'; defined as strange and frightening (ibid: 132).⁸ "Secret places on the human body, the pudenda: Those who did not die were smitten in secret places,

⁵ Casting and materiality of De Bruyckere's sculptures have been discussed in chapter three.

⁶ The exhibition is considered an updated version of Mike Kelley's exhibition at the ICA in 1992. Kelley, M. (2004a). *The Uncanny. Tate Liverpool*. Available from <http://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-liverpool/exhibition/mike-kelley-uncanny> [Accessed 5 November 2013]. The show featured contemporary artists such as Ron Mueck, Paul McCarthy, Paul Thek, Judy Fox, Mike Kelley, Tony Matelli, Tony Oursler, Christo, Nayland Blake, Sarah Lucas, Keith Edmier, Hans Bellmer, Marcel Duchamp, Robert Gober, Jake and Dinos Chapman, Allen Jones, and many others.

⁷ In this exhibition however, as Kelley notes, the uncanny is not limited to sculptures that provoke uncanny "bodily association", but expand on the theme including the urge to collect. The disparate collection of works presented besides figurative art comprised Kelley personal 'collections', as well as non-art objects such as medical models, taxidermy, preserved human parts and a large collection of historical photographs. In his essay "Playing with Dead Things: On the Uncanny", the curator points out how "figurative sculptures of body parts from the early 1990s are excellent examples of the uncanny as they induce "a physical sensation... an unsettling evocation of the 'real'" (Kelley, M. and Welchman, J. 2003: 71).

⁸ Although in modern German 'heimlich' always assumes the meaning of secretive, Freud in his book *The Uncanny* reproduces all definitions of 'heimlich' found in Daniel Sanders' dictionary, where the first meaning of 'heimilich' is: "belonging to the house, not strange, familiar, tame, dear and intimate, homely, etc" (Freud, S. 2003: 126).

[Samuel 5,12]” (Ibid: 133). De Bruyckere’s sculptures, like this shift from ‘heimlich’, meaning homelike and domestic, towards the idea of hidden body parts, creates ambivalent and conflicting feelings in the spectators through the fragmentation and reassembling of the well-known body into an unattainable proposition. Indeed, one of the artist’s aims is to convey doubt, “perhaps because of [her] aversion to so-called certainties that, in [her] opinion, are no longer applicable to our times. We are searching for rules and habits to survive, but we keep on doubting” (De Bruyckere, B. in Gnyp, M. 2010). Undeniably, these fragmented, misshapen, tortured bodies, an antithesis of the heroic ones, are too familiar to be dismissed as just aesthetic abstractions. De Bruyckere’s death-like figures refer to the ‘real body’, through form and colour, but also signal unfeasibility and absence, as the human body is presented as impossibly deformed and heads, innards and bones, are missing. De Bruyckere’s transformation of the ‘familiar’ body into an ‘unfamiliar’ fragmented and distorted object, may trigger uncanny sensations and cause intellectual doubts in the audience (Ibid: 152, 153).

Yet for artists, this uncertainty is what gives rise to creation, as Berlinde de Bruyckere notes: “doubt is an integral part of making sculptures or works of art in general, whereas certainty gives you nothing to say” (Theys H. and De Bruyckere, B. (2011). Louise Bourgeois, as well, believed that the need to produce art could be seen as a way to maintain sanity and that this need would disappear with certainty (Larratt-Smith, P. 2012: 7). De Bruyckere, consequently, can be seen as a cultural ‘researcher’ who takes the body apart and rebuilds it into new combinations of fragments, taking advantage of the spectator’s propensity to react strongly when the body is damaged and the skin is opened. Although the body piece, in the sculptural representation, may keep its primary significance in its new configuration, it may also be encoded with many different functions, which will potentially be positioned at odds with the whole and, therefore, threaten the stable identity of the viewer.

5.2 Absence of Presence: The Eerie in Berlinde De Bruyckere’s Figures

Nicholas Royle has suggested that “the absence of what ought to be present is eerie”, whereas, “the presence of what ought to be absent is uncanny” (Royle, N. 2003: 88). *Marthe* (2008) is a headless being and her gaze is absent. She cannot meet our gaze and look back at us. Berlinde De Bruyckere’s wax figures are mostly presented headless or with the head covered or hidden underneath pillows. What feelings may this absence convey to the audience? When looking at De Bruyckere’s sculptures, the questions might arise: how important is it to consider the

notion of the power of the unseen; and how important is it to consider or interpret what is visible and what is missing? Does the absence of body parts always have to be compensated for by a narrative?

For De Bruyckere, the presence or absence of the head in her sculptures appears to be irrelevant. Indeed, she states:

It is not because you never see a head that it looks like it has been cut off. It is, rather, that I no longer think the presence of a head is necessary. The figure as a whole is a mental state. The presence or absence of a head is irrelevant (De Bruyckere, B. 2006).

As the artist has suggested in the interview reported above, the head's absence in her sculptures may put more emphasis on the body, transforming the displayed parts into a 'mental state'. Yet this mental state implies a real or imagined loss, a lack or an imperfection. Indeed, the fragmented body always encompasses the vulnerability of the human body and implicitly signals loss or the danger of violence.

As a category, the body fragment is defined by both the absence and the presence of certain body parts, which always contain two possible interpretations. The body fragment as the real and tangible object that we can see and touch, and the body fragment as a sign, pointing to what is missing (Lichtenstein, J in Tronzo, W. 2009: 120).

Nevertheless, the representation of a headless figure may be considered more anonymous and, therefore, preferable to represent 'human kind'.⁹ As De Bruyckere's contends, "the faces are not timeless. They are too private and have nothing to do with eternity. The body is always the same" (De Bruyckere, B. 2013 in Zhao, S.). In contrast to the traditional representation of important people through their head or portrait, the artist strips her figures of the most individual trait: the face, facilitating in this way the viewer's identification with the sculptures. In fact, the human face and the voice play a major role in interpersonal relations. As Tomkins explains the face is the main locus of affect exchange and a powerful tool with which to communicate emotions. To look directly into another's eyes bares the danger of "affect contagion" (Tomkins, S. 2009: 187, 189). Bodies, however, are not timeless and static entities. Bodies are highly individual, albeit not as much as faces, and are subject to changing fashions.¹⁰

In an interview, De Bruyckere was asked about the reason behind this absence in her

⁹ See chapter seven.

¹⁰ For example, the way the body look can change through different regimes of sports/gym, diets and tattoos.

work, she replied that she did not give to her figures a recognisable face,

...because the communication between the image and the viewer should go through the totality. If you give a sculpture a face, then it becomes immediately the reference point and makes the sculpture too easily accessible. I don't want to direct the attention to the face because only a total image has meaning (De Bruyckere, B in Gnyp, M. 2010).

Although we may agree that the face is the primary site of recognition, a word of caution is needed at this point, as De Bruyckere's figures, although endowed with anonymity through the missing head/face, all have fair skin. De Bruyckere's fragmented figures then, have to be positioned within a Western socio-cultural background and be read as such. As will be discussed in the next chapter, this fact draws attention to the difficulties and contradictions involved in the attempt to create a timeless and 'universal' body.¹¹

Nonetheless, the head's absence may focus the viewer's attention on the broken body, its vulnerability and mortality, transforming the visual experience into a more embodied occurrence. In fact, it could also be argued that the presence of body parts, in De Bruyckere's sculptures, through materiality and similarity with the real body, not only inhabit the physical space but also invade and attach themselves onto the viewers' body and the image they have of it. Indeed, what is missing may particularly attract the spectators' attention, becoming more personal and present in their mind and could, therefore, be placed in the realm of what can be sensed. The missing part, when interpreted as absence, will open a space whereupon the spectators can project their own body, real or imagined. *Marthe* (2008) then, becomes a hybrid, an in-between object, whose 'identity' is formed through the combination of the visible and what every spectator projects onto her skin. The missing, but felt body part, is then invested with a powerful psychical form of presence.

One could argue that both, the-heads'-absence, as direct relation, and the heads'-presence, as its determinative negations, determine De Bruyckere's figure's 'identity'. As discussed in chapter four according to Hegel, the identity of everything is established by the sum of its components, that is to say, all its direct relations and "its determinative negations" (Belfour, I. in Tronzo, W. 2009: 83).¹² In *Marthe* 2008 (image 5-1), the head's absence, as one of its direct

¹¹ For a discussion of the contradiction between the im/possibility of representing 'a universal body' and the creation of artworks conveying shared existential experiences with a specific body, see chapter seven.

¹² Hegel saw in this impossibility to obtain absolute knowledge a challenge. In *Phenomenology of Spirit* he stated that the identity of everything (people, things, words, events, ideas and so on) is established by the sum of its relations. Identity, therefore, it is not only determined by all its direct relations but also by all "its determinative negations", by what it is not (Belfour, I. in Tronzo, W. 2009: 83).

relations, could be interpreted as questioning the neo-classical portrait bust of the eighteenth century, which represented the personality of Wo/man as a whole through the likeness of the head fragment. Hence, the head's absence may be seen as draining *Marthe's* (2008), individuality, pointing to a vacuum of 'identity' and the impossibility of finding stability and unity. *Marthe's* imaginary head's presence instead, as its determinative negation, may contribute to enhancing the spectators' involvement in the artwork by projecting their own identity upon the sculpture by filling in the gap left from the missing head.

Can then the missing body part in De Bruyckere's figures, be said to exist in parallel to the represented or visible part? How important is the absence and therefore, the imaginary body part, in the understanding of her sculptures? But most importantly at this point, the question of a possible co-existence of two different modes of thinking about the body fragment should be raised. Can the body fragment as an independent entity coexist with the body fragment that is conceived as dependent on its missing parts?

For Fuery, absence can be separated into primary and secondary absence. Primary absence creates meaning, which is independent of any presence and "exists in its own right". Secondary absence, instead is based on the binaries of presence/absence, which finds its meaning in the relation to presence (Fuery, P.1995: 1-3). In De Bruyckere's *Marthe* (2008), the head's absence can be seen as both a primary and a secondary absence, for the head, absence originated with the artist's conscious act of creating a sculpture without head and, therefore, independent from presence. However, viewers will imply a different degree of 'presentness', creating in this way, a personal connection to what is believed to be missing, positioning their experience of *Marthe* (2008) in a personal range between primary and secondary absence. It could also be argued that spectators will project their personal anxieties on the skin of both the present and absent body parts.

In De Bruyckere's *Marthe* (2008), therefore, the head's absence becomes an important site on which meaning is constructed. The viewers, presented with De Bruyckere's figures, find an absence, where they expected to find a presence. Absence, however, cannot be equated to 'nothingness', but becomes an active signifying process born out of intentions (Sartre, JP. 2009: 50-51). To both Sartre and Fuery, absence creates desire. Desire for the missing part, object or person. Absence, therefore, plays an important role in peoples' emotional and material life, influencing the way in which they live and perceive their present lives.

Absence can be viewed as a powerful 'felt presence', influencing spectators' understanding of themselves and the world in which they live. Moreover, being an important

element of desire and signification, absence plays an essential role in the constitution of subjectivity. In fact, the dyad presence / absence is a common element in the various psychoanalytical models of the self. Following the Freudian ‘first recognition’ of the infant separation from the mother with the game “Fort/Da”, which reproduces the presence and absence of the maternal body (Freud, S. 1961: 9), Lacan connects the child’s detachment from the mother with the entrance into language and, therefore, the symbolic order. The symbolic order builds upon a set of ‘opposite’ signifiers, such as that between presence and absence, always pointing to the possibility that something is missing. To accept language, therefore, is to accept the opposition between presence and absence, as the sign we use to describe an object is just the transferral of a presence to an absence (Lacan, J. Seminar IV: 66).¹³ Words, such as ‘mother’, offer the potential to fill an absence – the mother’s absence - with a presence. The words we use to describe things and concepts (signifiers), which are used in the absence of the object, are “a presence made of absences” (Lacan, J. 2006: 228). This reciprocity of presence and absence in the symbolic order invests absence with an equally positive existence as presence (Lacan, J. Seminar IV: 183-184).

As the absent part in the denotative level of a sign’s structure influences its overall meaning, should we then also assume that the absent head plays a fundamental role in the understanding and interpretation of De Bruyckere’s sculpture *Marthe* (2008) (image 5-1)? The impossibility of eye contact with *Marthe*, in fact, could unsettle the spectator’s Lacanian experience of recognition, disrupting the illusion of control over the sculpture. Lacan’s writing on the eye and the gaze can be interpreted as the continuation of the mirror-stage, in which fragmentation is symbolically set in motion and the myth of apparent wholeness is created in order to avoid the ‘Freudian’ anxiety about fragmentation (Lacan, J. 2006: 85). Faced with either imaginary unity in the mirror (the ideal I), or body fragmentation, the child prefers to identify with the illusion of narcissistic completeness. This desire for unity is crucial to the sense of self of the subjects, but also gives birth to unconscious fantasies of disunity. For Lacan, the subjects’ desire to see themselves as a totality, whilst necessary for de-alienation from the original fragmentary experience, is realised at the expense of a misrecognition which will persist as the body in pieces (Lacan, J. 2006: 80). In fact, the mastering gaze is formed during this stage, as infants anticipate their bodily wholeness and prefers to believe in the

¹³ “...c'est l'opposition de l'institution du symbole pour : (+) ou (-), présence ou absence, dans lequel il n'y a rien qu'une sorte de position objectivable du donné du jeu”, Lacan, J. (1957). Seminar IV: La Relation d'Objet. <http://staferla.free.fr/S4/S4%20LA%20RELATION.pdf> [Accessed 29 September 2013].

illusionary control of their uncoordinated real body.

The absent head and the opening of the body in De Bruyckere's sculptures, may force the viewer to detach the gaze, disrupting the relationship between the viewer and the work. In the process of subjecting the work to our control, we are brought back to the loss and fragmentation at the heart of the subject, facing again the initial misrecognition in the mirror as the spectator rejects, once again, his fragmented body in favour of a coherent image of wholeness (Lacan, J. 2006: 75-81).

Lacan interprets the gaze as the point at which mastery collapses. The gaze is not the look that the subjects gives to the object, but refers to the sense that the object is looking back at them, drawing attention to the fact that the spectators become aware of being the object of the gaze only when the world does not reciprocate the look (Lacan, J. 2004, 105-106). It is this ability of representation to take advantage of this "exchange of gazes", that informs the desire to see the self through the image of the 'other' (Phelan, P. 1993: 16). The gaze then, becomes a point of identification in which looking is turned into a kind of self-representation for the spectator, (Ibid: 15). The negation of this 'exchange of gazes' is particularly relevant for the interpretation of De Bruyckere's artwork. The head's absence in *Marthe* (2008) (figure 5-1), may play with the sense of unease caused by destabilising the mastery over the gaze, which unseats the subject from its secure position as surveyor of all that it sees. The viewers then, may either identify with the body in the sculpture as an ideal, or they will objectify the 'other' to reinforce their sense of superiority. When looking at images of mutilation and fragmentation as in De Bruyckere's sculptures, viewers may be able to keep the Lacanian illusion of the whole body, whilst at the same time, taking part in the unconscious desire for bodily fragmentation (Lacan, J. 2006: 85). The head's absence, therefore, opens up a variety of possible interpretations and is transformed into a creative space out of which new meanings and links emerge. The missing head in *Marthe* (2008) leaves not only a physical space but also a 'mental' space into which viewers can project their memory and personal bodily experiences.

In addition, the act of looking always involves a comparison. The absence of a returning gaze may also alter the power relationship between the figure represented in the sculpture and the spectator. The viewer might feel free to stare at *Marthe* (2008) in the most indiscrete way, as the headless statue has been deprived of her right to 'stare back' and seems to have joined the ranks of the powerless. Berlinde De Bruyckere's sculpture can be seen but cannot return the gaze, thus becoming "object of information, never subject in communication" (Foucault,

M. 1991: 200). As in the Panopticon, “the machine for dissociating the see/being seen dyad”, *Marthe*’s headless body is always seen without returning the gaze, whereas I, the spectator, seem to take up the position of power and enjoy the ability to see everything without being seen.

Moreover, the absence of the head may denote the inability to speak or scream. The spectator standing in front of *Marthe* (2008) is confronted with a silent transformation. The artist in a way has castrated *Marthe* by rendering her silent, pointing to the fact that the one who is suffering does not have a voice in our society. In this context, *Marthe* (2008) is doubly lacking, because as a female figure, she does not possess the ‘symbol of power’ - the phallus - and she is also lacking the voice. However, this silence may differ from the total absence of the voice, as it could be connected to sounds and screams experienced beforehand.¹⁴

5.3 From Desire to Suffering

De Bruyckere’s deformed, empty wax sculptures and the detailed reproduction of body parts through casting, not only evoke uncanny bodily associations through the familiar made ‘strange’, but also reinforce the ‘uncanny feeling’, because her figures seem dominated by uncontrollable impulses and desires. In fact, the effect on viewers of the uncanny, “apparent animate objects”, like wax figures and dolls, originally pointed out by Jentsch, was elaborated upon by Freud to include the fear of being taken over by forces outside the body (Freud, S. 2003: 125,135).



5-2: Berlinde De Bruyckere: *Liggende I*, 2012, wax, epoxy, iron armature, wood, cotton, wool, 140 x 235 x 76cm

¹⁴ See chapter three and chapter seven.

Berlinde De Bruyckere's series of sculptures based on Ovid's 'Metamorphosis', *Liggende I* (2012), *Liggende II* (2012) and *Actaeon* (2011–2012) (images 5-2, 5-3 and 5-6), may indeed point to desire as a powerful source of transformation and destruction, where these uncontrollable human impulses become entangled with the sense of self, creating, in this way, a potential source of uncanny feelings.



5-3: Berlinde De Bruyckere: *Liggende II*, 2012, wax, epoxy, iron armature, wood, cotton.

140 x 231 x 76 cm

Of particular interest, in images 5-2 and 5-3, is the way in which the artist forces the spectator to confront the body when it is chaotic, vulnerable and in a state of Ovidian transformation. This depiction of the body as fragmented, weak and in 'transition' unsettles the dominant ontology of embodiment by rejecting the 'traditional' representation of bodies as functioning and in control. Indeed, De Bruyckere presenting the audience with a body out of control, "disrupts this illusion, the fantasy of "le corps propre, one's own clean and proper body" (Kristeva, J. 1982: 102). When the body is in a state of transformation, where the borders between subject and objects like branches or antlers are blurred, the human condition is perceived as fragmented too.

For Kristeva, abjection is both a process of separation and a process of subject constitution. In her book, *Powers of Horror*, she describes the child's separation from the maternal body as the first instance of abjection. Comparable to Lacan's 'entrance into the symbolic', in Kristeva's theorisation of the abject, the infant establishes the boundaries between the self and the mother in order to access language and obtain speaking subjectivity, constituting him/herself as an independent subject. The mother, as the abject, threatens the

boundaries of the self and other; inside and outside, and the child has to constantly force her away and disavow her in order to maintain a consistent subjectivity (ibid: 3). As Kristeva notes; “abjection is above all ambiguity” (ibid: 9), because the subjects are not only never completely separated from what they have attempted to abject, but is also formed and influenced by it in terms of affect and desire.

In contrast to Freud’s tripartite model of the psyche, where conscious and unconscious never come into contact, in Kristeva’s theorisation of abjection, the “unconscious content” is not ‘safely’ repressed and stored away, but drifts at the edge of self-definition, making the distinction between object and subject impossible (ibid: 7). Ultimately, subjectivity will never form and the subject will never feel ordered and knowledgeable, as the safe boundary between unconscious and conscious is always incomplete (ibid: 1, 7).

Both Kristeva’s psychoanalytical notion of abjection and the fear and death caused by AIDS in the 1980s, were crucial to the reception of artwork that questioned the relationship between body and visceral materials, as well as the revival of the artwork that presented the body as fragmented. The exhibition at the Whitney Museum of American Art, ‘Abject Art: Desire and Repulsion in American Art’ (1993), for instance, presented the work of artists considered to inhabit the world outside of the limits set by mainstream and, therefore, taking up the role of the ‘new Avant-Garde’. These artists challenged and stretched the boundaries of the body, and played an important role in the theorising of the body fragment in art (Menninghouse, W. 2003: 96; Jones, A. 2006b: 391; Betterton, R. 1996: 136).¹⁵

The artworks of Smith Robert Mapplethorpe (1946-1989), Sue William and Mike Kelley and Robert Gober have often been regarded as causing abject reactions in the spectators. Linda Kauffman, for instance, describes Smith’s work “as a study in abjection” (Kauffman, L. 1998: 46). For example, Gober’s sculpture *Untitled* (1991) (image 5-4), a leg plagued by drains, suggests a leaky body, drawing attention to the functioning of the social and psychic methods at work in homophobic discourses (Watney, S. 2000: 157). Body fragments have also been

¹⁵ Fifty American artists took part in this exhibition: Robert Gober, Lynda Ben, Mike Kelley, Lee Bontecou, Louise Bourgeois, Chris Burden, Bruce Conner, Marcel Duchamp, Nancy Grossman, David Hammons, Eva Hesse, Jasper Johns, Mary Kelly, Willem De Kooning, Yayoi Kusama, Zoe Leonard, Robert Mapplethorpe, John Miller, Robert Morris, Bruce Nauman, Claes Oldenburg, Rafael Ortiz Montanez, Adrian Piper, Robert Rauschenberg, Lucas Samaras, Andres Serrano, Cindy Sherman, Kiki Smith, Paul Thek, Cy Twombly,; Andy Warhol, Hannah Wilke, May Wilson, David Wojnarowicz,; Vito Acconci, Maria Beatty, Sadie Benning, Gregg Bordowitz, Sammy Cucher, Danny Fass, Joe Kelly, Isaac Julien, Lynne Littmann, Jennifer Montgomery, Azian Nurudin, Suzie Silver, Hollis Frampton (Taylor, S et al., 1993).

connected to loss of blood, which during the 1990s was often associated with the AIDS epidemic.



5-4: **Robert Gober**, *Untitled*, 1991-1993, wood, beeswax, human hair, fabric, paint and shoes.

Artists in the 1990s (Antoni, J., Smith, K., Rona Pondick to name but a few) continued the trend set in the 1960s to produce artworks made of transient materials. Janine Antoni, for example, in *Lick and Lather* (1993) (image 5-5) produced seven self-portrait busts made of soap and seven made of chocolate, playing with the tradition of classical statues.



5-5: **Janine Antoni**, *Lick and Lather*, 1993, installed in the New Museum show "NYC 1993: Experimental Jet Set, Trash and No Star."

The brown chocolate busts, licked to different degrees, and the seven soap busts used like soap in a bathtub by the artist, presents a smooth surface, where the detail of the artist's resemblance disappeared and is substituted by a distorted memory of her 'external look' (ART21. 2003). Through the process of 'licking and lathering' the notion that the 'external look' in the form of a bust or a portrait can show the character or identity of a unitary subject is questioned. Furthermore, in using chocolate, Antoni comments on women's eating disorders and on the pressure to abide to society's beauty ideals. As the artist stated in an interview: "For me it really is about this kind of love-hate relationship we have with our physical appearance", (ART21. 2003).

The effects of abjection such as repulsion and disavowal, play an important role in De Bruyckere's sculptures, as they point to the fragility of the human body and highlight events that disturb the boundaries of the subject, threatening, in this way the conscious ego (Kristeva, J. 1982: 3). As Elizabeth Grosz writes:

What has been expelled from the subject's corporeal functioning can never be fully obliterated but hovers at the border of the subject's identity, threatening apparent unities and stabilities with disruption and possible dissolution (Grosz E. 1990: 87).

The perforated flesh of *Actaeon* in *Liggende I* and *Liggende II* (2012) (images 5-2 and 5-3), may induce a range of different reactions, like disgust - at Actaeon's weakness when faced with his desire; the compulsion to look away at the sight of open flesh; indifference or just curiosity. However, independently from their initial reactions the spectators may well reluctantly engage in a contradictory identification with the 'object' in the sculpture. It could also be argued that Actaeon's strong resemblance to the 'biological' human body, may not only heighten the involvement of the spectators but also draw attention to the unstable and frail relationship between the interior and exterior boundaries of the body. The antlers and branches, in *Liggende I* and *Liggende II* (2012), traverse borders and grow into the body, transforming it into a plant-like structure and taking it over. The skin can no longer fulfil the role of protective barrier between the self and the outside world, as antlers and branches tear it open exposing the content of the body. Spectators, confronted with the broken skin, a skin that has failed to protect the figures from attacks of the inside of the body and of the outside world, become aware of the slow and constant process of transformation of their own body. Actaeon's body is uncontainable and menacing, a metamorphic body which disturbs the limits

of identity, causing abjection. As in Ovid's metamorphoses, the body of Actaeon, in De Bruyckere's *Liggende I and II* (2012) sculptures, is in a state of transition.

The antlers and branches breach the body's boundaries and thus, threaten the stability and predictability of the subject's sense of self. The body in pain, as Actaeon's body, may point to the 'self' in pain, which is lost in a continuous in-between state of transition. For Kristeva, the process of establishing the boundaries between inside and outside is itself a bodily process and with that, she is highlighting the uncertainty and weakness of the boundaries that constitute the single person. Shildrick agrees and notes how the indeterminacy of body boundaries and the unclear distinctions between inside and out, "threatens the basis on which the knowing self establishes control" (Shildrick, M. 1997: 34). Abjection then, is the anxiety and rejection we have for everything that crosses those boundaries, as the antlers in De Bruyckere's *Actaeon* do, questioning the process of separation and creating uncertainty.

The myth of metamorphosis provides De Bruyckere with both the story and the body as sites of creativity, which opens up the possibility of investigating identity formation through cultural signification and corporeal transformation. For these sculptures, (images 5-2 and 5-3), De Bruyckere found inspiration in the fate of the young prince Actaeon as he hunted in the forest. He unintentionally arrived at the place where Diana and her companions were bathing in the sacred grove. The goddess Diana turned him into a deer to punish him for looking upon her divine nudity. His hounds, not recognising him, pursued and tore him to pieces (Hall, J. 1979: 102). It is important to point out that, in the case of these sculptures, like in Ovid's 'Metamorphoses', where the human body is regularly fragmented, the artist is referring mainly to the transformation of a human being into a new form, as in the case of Osiris.¹⁶

There are two types of 'Metamorphoses' occurring in Ovid; the transformation of a human being into an animal, which is connected to the area of magic; and the sacred apotheosis of the human being, which is reserved for the Isis religion (Wlosok, A. in Harrison, S. 1999: 154). De Bruyckere's figures always present broken, flayed skin as a means of investigating the internal layers, bringing us back to the idea of emotional purification present in Greek theatre. The ripping of the skin and the opening of the body to expose the inside in art, is made

¹⁶ This Myth is based on the story of Osiris, the brother and husband of Isis. According to the tale Seth, killed Osiris. Isis found the dead body of her husband. Although she recognised Osiris's dead body, she was not emotionally ready to accept her loss. Isis set sail to bring Osiris's body back to her land. Once she reached home, she left his body hidden but unattended in a remote area to go visit her son. During her absence Seth gained possession of the body, tore it into fourteen pieces, and scattered its fragments far and wide throughout Egypt. But Isis once more set out on a difficult journey to collect the fragments of her dismembered husband. She built a temple for every piece of body she found to honour him. She found thirteen parts of Osiris's body. An oxyrhynchus fish had devoured the fourteenth piece (Knapp, B. 1997: 9-11)

acceptable by “their collective transformative effects”, which relate to the pleasure of continuous transformation and mutation that occur in Greek mythology and especially, in Ovid’s ‘Metamorphosis’ (Walsh, M. 2013: 127). Indeed, whether violent, like the death of Actaeon, or erotic, dismemberment is one of the ‘Metamorphoses’ chief organisational principles as Ovid concentrates on the dismemberment and transformation of bodies into new forms (Enterline L. 2000: 99). This preoccupation with transformations and metamorphosis – as in the sculpture mentioned above, puts the emphasis on processes that involve transition, shifting the focus from a static subjectivity to ‘becoming’.¹⁷ De Bruyckere’s reference to transformations and metamorphoses, recalls the ‘anthropological’ debate on ‘liminality’. The condition of which is not only a fertile source of rituals, but also a source of inspiration for myth and art.

Victor Turner defines liminal space and time as a transitory spacio-temporal phase that opens up in-between fixed states. For him liminality is:

Necessarily ambiguous, since this condition and these persons elude or slip through the network of classifications that normally locate states and positions in cultural space. Liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, convention and ceremonial (Turner, V. 1977: 95).

Actaeon (2012) is caught in a continual process of metamorphosis, inhabiting the liminal space between living and dead, human and animal, highlighting in this way the potential transgressive effect of this transformation. Neither human nor tree, Actaeon’s ‘subjectivity’ is under threat. Indeed, ‘misbehaviour’ typified in rituals has been connected to transgressive contemporary imagery, shifting the emphasis from social practice to the spectators’ possible engagement with the art object (Jenks, C. 2003: 154). Thus, as already discussed in chapter three, both the positioning of De Bruyckere’s distorted figures in this constant liminal state and the likely activation of abject feelings in the viewer, could be interpreted as potentially blurring the boundaries between ethic and aesthetic and, therefore, connecting artwork and the body to the “politics of perception”. As Papenburg and Zarzycka contend, ‘transgressive artwork’ cannot be reduced to a mere attack on ‘good taste’, it

denotes the confounding of the boundary between ethics and aesthetic extending to the disruption of normative cultural framework and the breakthrough into new theoretical ground by way of exploring

¹⁷ See Braidotti, R. (2008). *Metamorphoses: Towards a Materialist Theory of Becoming*. Cambridge & Malden: Polity.

the transformative potential of alternative perceptual modalities such as multisensoriality, sensation and affectivity” (Papenburg, B. and Zarzycka, M. 2013: 6-7).

Lynn Enterline maintains that both Ovid’s ‘Metamorphoses’ and psychoanalytical theories say more about the desiring subject than the object of desire itself. The fetish in both cases attracts the desiring subject as it stands in as compensation for a deep disappointment with ‘reality’. Actaeon’s fragmented body in *Liggende I* and *Liggende II* (2012) may work according to the logic of fetishism, denying the very dismembering it evokes and evades. The naked body of the Goddess Diana, even though divine, is still a woman’s body. As soon as Actaeon looks at the woman’s body, his own body is literally taken apart as a consequence. As an attentive reading of Ovid may suggest, the only possible response to the threat of imminent dismemberment, may be the neutralisation, through ‘active’ dismemberment of the same threat. Ultimately, however, the fear and fascination with body parts may be considered an implicit example of castration anxiety and as Freud notes the fetish works precisely to defend against dismemberment, in particular the dismemberment of castration (Enterline, L. 2000: 100).

Abjection has the ability to provoke feelings of attraction and disgust, simultaneously taking Freud’s ‘unfamiliarity’ a step further and “insisting on the haunting nature of corporality”. We may recognise, in this dyad of attraction/repulsion, the divided attitude towards the body in Western society. Bodies are simultaneously desired and rejected as they remind us of our mortality (Kristeva, J. 1982: 3-4; McGinn, C. 2011: 35). Actaeon’s metamorphoses (images 5-2 and 5-3), which describes the process of transformation from totality into scattered body parts, highlights the discontinuity, the impossibility of controlling and containing the body. Moreover, the tree branches or antlers in *Liggende I* and *Liggende II* (2012) cannot be assimilated by the figure as merely an extension of the body, but growing out of the body and piercing the skin, they become a comment on the transience and vulnerability of human beings.

Actaeon (2012) is a tangle of antlers rested on a low wooden plinth covered with a white cloth. Their pointed corners, bony appearance and chaotic entanglement, seem to contrast with the softness of the white cloths. One of the main differences between *Liggende I*, *Liggende II* and *Actaeon*, is that the latter does not illustrate Actaeon’s transformation, but focuses instead on the moment after death. The figure has disappeared, the flesh dissipated, leaving behind only traces of its former presence. Actaeon has been stripped of all signs of ‘identity’ and has

been reduced to a shapeless mass of antlers, which could be seen as reminiscent of dead branches in the woods. The antlers, icons of male power, strength and sexuality, are bruised and covered with blood. Viewers may interpret them as a symbol of unnecessary violence and suffering. Whether a symbol of strength or senseless violence, the antlers, like Actaeon's flesh, will eventually give way to the passing of time and disappear.



5-6: Berlinde De Bruyckere, *Actaeon*, 2012, wax, wood, fabric, epoxy, iron armature
142 x 233.5 x 80 cm

The antlers, once symbols of power and desire, are shown as disembodied and vulnerable, they stand in for a post-mortem portrait of Actaeon. Instead of the celebratory, neo-classical traditional bust, which highlights the power of the represented subject, Actaeon's portrait becomes a hypothesis that points to the dangerous repercussions of power and desire. Both the materiality of the antlers and the way in which Actaeon's portrait is presented in image 5-6, are in stark contrast with traditional bust portraits. Instead of the attention to detail in accurately reproducing a resemblance of the portrayed subject in durable marble, typical of the 'celebratory sculptural portrait', De Bruyckere favours the impermanence and fragility of wax as a material. This transience may point to the vulnerability and ephemerality of human life and desires. The total absence of the human body in De Bruyckere's *Actaeon* (2012) (image 5-6) is, therefore, presented as a condition; a human condition that could be described as the

collective subjective, which echoes the presence/absence dyad discussed at the beginning of the chapter. *Actaeon* (2012), as the head in *Marthe* (image 5-1), is present and absent at the same time. He is the representation of Actaeon, with his very personal narrative, and he also conveys the ‘human condition’. The collective human condition that Lacan describes as the futility and impossibility of totally satisfying human desire. As the artist states:

The antlers are the way a deer can seduce a whole forest. It is something that is very strong and beautiful, an expression of power and sexuality in one way. Then on the other hand it is something that can destroy you because you have too much desire and too much longing for something that you can't have. That is the thing that destroys you. The desire motif in this work refers to the history of the hamam. If I used bodies instead, it would be too direct. So I chose antlers as a metonymic reference to lack and desire (De Bruyckere, B. in Burley, I. 2012).

Subjectivity and desire are indivisible, as desiring is a way to assert the sense of self and to mark the subject’s own existence. Desire causes frustration, because what the subject really wants is to return to the imaginary state of wholeness, which has been lost with the entrance into the symbolic order (Brown, M. 2000: 122). The subject’s psyche is split between the accessible conscious and the inaccessible unconscious, where the instinctual drives always remain hidden to the subject, creating a feeling that something is missing; a lack that the subject desperately wants to fill. The subject, therefore, at an unconscious level, feels forced to pursue the image of totality and self-identity enjoyed in the imaginary. The subject’s entrance into the symbolic order comes at the expense of the feeling of wholeness it had in the imaginary, causing a sense of ‘lack’. The subject will continuously long to regain his/her lost totality (Mansfield, N. 2000: 45-46).

Actaeon’s desire is insatiable and has driven him to destruction (image 5-6). For Lacan, not only is desire by definition insatiable, but it is also “the motor and the impasse or impossibility involved in the very phenomenon of desire” (Rabate, J. 2003: 178). As discussed in the Literature Review, according to Lacan, needs are a demand for love, a longing for the lost state of wholeness and unity with the caregiver, which the subject imagines existed in the pre-symbolic Real. Lacan describes this yearning for the lost wholeness as desire that will never be satisfied (Brown, M. 2000: 122).



5-7: **Berlinde De Bruyckere**, *Three Sculptures*, Installation View, Hauser & Wirth Zurich, Switzerland, 2012.

It is worth mentioning here that the sculpture *Actaeon* (2012) is part of an installation alongside two other sculptures *Liggende I* and *Liggende II* (2012) discussed above. My analysis, therefore, presupposes knowledge of the metamorphosis undergone by the body, even if the spectator is unaware of the narrative behind *Actaeon*. Although the three figures are isolated, each on its own plinth, the homogeneity of materials, sculptural technique and presentation of the figures in this installation creates a link between them. In fact, *Actaeon* (2012), can also be seen as a synecdoche in which a fragment stands in for the whole story. Interpreting *Actaeon* (2012) as a synecdoche highlights the fact that every action has consequences. In this context, the story behind Actaeon's fate is given prominence, transforming the whole installation of *Liggende I*, *II* and *Actaeon* (image 5-7), into a fragment, placing emphasis on the missing parts. The spectators, when confronted with a body fragment are asked to fill in the gaps in the narrative.

Actaeon is a pile of remains, the leftover material. It is a body metamorphosed into a landscape. It is an absent body, but at the same time *Actaeon* (2012) is present in a state in which the difference between in and outside has vanished. It is this alluded presence of the body, the remnants of its former self through the bloody stained antlers, which may cause feelings of abjection in the spectator. It is a subject that has disrupted the boundaries with the world and, therefore, has become a site of psychosocial disgust. What is key about this interpretation is how it exposes the fact that bodies are made repulsive through undoing them.

The body, therefore, can be produced as a site of disgust when the boundaries of the body-as-single-entity are threatened. Indeed, De Bruyckere's *Actaeon* has lost his constitutive outside.

De Bruyckere's work revolves around and acquires meaning in this 'in between zone' of experience, emphasising the fragility of boundaries between the inside and outside; the 'Me and Not-Me'. In works such as *Marthe* (2008), *Liggende I* and *Liggende II* (2012), De Bruyckere uses wax sculptures cast from the bodies of dancers, drawing attention to the semblance of the 'biological' body, thus increasing the possible physical involvement of the spectator. At the same time, the artist exposes what the skin normally hides in order to question our own understanding of the body and its boundaries. At this border, both artist and spectator alike might have to face up to their mortality and find themselves "at the border of (their) condition as living being(s)" (Kristeva, J. 1982: 3). The physical transformation and deterioration in *Liggende I* and *Liggende II* may give rise to an instinctive response of horror, as we are reminded that our body is fragile, vulnerable, constantly changing and moving towards the end of life.

What may be of interest in these figures is that wax is not only used to mimic flesh and skin but also for other kinds of organic materials like branches or antlers. Therefore, the similarities between human and plant life seem to take centre stage. However, if branches and antlers refer to bones, then the inside / outside split turns out to be a split between flesh and bones, which is a very conventional split and one in which they remain entirely different and entirely separate. Both flesh and branches / antlers (bones), are associated with death but one will linger beyond death, since the branches and antlers will represent the person long after his / her demise. One could argue that in De Bruyckere's sculptures, branches and antlers taking over the symbolic power of bones represent the presence of death in the body as much as they represent the bones in the body.

These transformations in De Bruyckere's sculptures may emphasise the presence/absence dichotomy. As discussed at the beginning of this chapter, when the spectators are confronted with *Marthe*'s head absence (image 5-1), they may be compelled to question the subject's construction of borders, including the visible and invisible, determinant and indeterminate, and the 'presence through absence'. Similarly, Actaeon's metamorphoses, transforming his body from a still discernibly human form in *Liggende I* and *Liggende II* (2012), into a new form in image 5-7, which eventually will be re-absorbed by the natural world, may constitute a direct challenge to the subject's construction of borders and subjectivity. Actaeon's body, both in his representation in *Liggende I* and *Liggende II* (2012), and his transformation from flesh into

antlers in image 5-7, may be seen as an entity that represents the final border problem. Indeed, it is the signification of the corpse in these sculptures that is both, a physical entity residing in the symbolic sphere, but also an entity that breaks down the border between the symbolic and the 'biological body'; that might simultaneously fascinate and disgust the spectator.

As Kristeva notes:

The corpse, the most sickening of wastes, is a border that has encroached upon everything ... is the utmost of abjection. It is death infecting life ... The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite”
(Kristeva, J. 1982: 3-4).

The danger and fear of the corpse endangers the wholeness of the subject's identity that has been so carefully put together in the symbolic order, luring the subject “toward the place where meaning collapses” (Kristeva, J. 1982: 2), where he/she oscillates “between inside and outside, pleasure and pain, word and deed, would find death, along with nirvana” (Kristeva, J. 1982: 63-64).

5.4 The Representation of Absence

The transformation from flesh into antlers in *Actaeon* (2012) (image 5-6), evokes the transformation of presence into 'the ultimate' absence. Death, in contrast to absence, encompasses absolute loss and entails “the possibility of never coming back..., of losing its position” (Smith R. R. 2010: 13). Representations of 'absolute loss' become misrepresentations (Townsend, C. 2008: 1). Nonetheless, De Bruyckere's figures 'materialise' and immortalise this ultimate fragmentation of mortality into a seemingly stable form, pausing in a way this ultimate transformation to enable the viewers to see and in doing so, allowing them the illusion of acquiring impossible knowledge.

Throughout the twentieth century cultural commentaries in both philosophy and psychoanalysis have attributed a central role to both the anxiety about and the denial of death, and they regard life's end as the foundation of all anxieties (Arthur, K. 2004: 70). Indeed, while it is certain that we will die, we cannot in any way gain knowledge of this experience as it happens only once and, therefore, cannot be verifiable.¹⁸ According to Freud, however, it is the very impossibility of being able to satisfy the desire to acquire knowledge about our own

¹⁸ I am aware of the research that has been done with near death experiences, however this topic is not part of my enquiry.

death that urges the unconscious drives to return again and again to the end point. He considers the effort to dismiss death from life as “toxic”, connecting anxiety and neurosis to both the terrors of nature and the painful enigma of death (Arthur, K. 2004: 70).¹⁹

De Bruyckere’s figures, investigated in these chapters, inhabit the realm of the unstable and precarious, a place in which the body is in a constant process of transformation and disintegration. These crumbling bodies seem to function at the border between stability and dissolution, and exhibit the dynamics of repetition compulsion that characterise the Freudian death drive. The spectator confronted with the destruction, transformation and the ‘imaginary’ decomposition in De Bruyckere’s figures is subjected to the ‘mysterious masochistic’ tendencies of the Ego which gains pleasure from contradiction, ambiguity and fragmentation. As Freud suggests, these repetitions allow the subject to take on an active part in mastering ‘displeasurable’ and overpowering events (Freud, S. 1961: 10). Could this in part explain our fascination with the body’s dismemberment? Why might we be compelled, as viewers, to constantly re-enact this ‘pleasurable displeasure’? And how does this repetition relate to the artwork of Berlinde De Bruyckere?

In his much discussed and controversial essay, ‘Beyond the Pleasure Principle’ (1920), Freud introduces the concept of the death drive to explain events like the repetition of trauma by war survivors, the re-enacting of the mother’s disappearance by children (Fort/Da game), and the fact that repressed painful events are always re-lived in the present. These events seemed to contradict the ‘will to survive’, linked to the pleasure principle (Freud, S. 1961: 9). He suggested that the death drive tends to repeat trauma in order to seek masochistic pleasure rather than conservative homeostasis. According to Freud, the pleasure principle, which seems to originate mostly in the subject’s own ‘internal perception’, always aims “to free the mental apparatus entirely from excitation or to keep the amount of excitation in it constant or to keep it as low as possible” (ibid: 56).

The death drive also manifests itself in a certain ‘compulsion to repeat’, whereby representation of a trauma gains impetus from the source it can only represent. This compulsion to repeat is a mental process (ibid: 17), which is played out in the “unconscious repressed” (ibid: 14). The liberation of the repressed would cause displeasure to the Ego. The re-experience of repressed instinctual impulses under the compulsion to repeat, causes feelings

¹⁹ Western art could be interpreted as a relentless effort to understand and cope with the inevitability of death. Cultural artefacts, such as artworks, are often seen as a way of dealing with the fear of death. The artist Mike Kelley, for instance, maintains that the uncanny can also be understood as the unsettling sensation of death in the mind of the living. For him wax figures and human doubling threaten the boundaries between the living and the dead (Walsh, M, 2013: 31).

of displeasure to the Ego. Interestingly, this displeasure is not in contradiction with the pleasure principle, as the displeasure in one system may cause pleasure in another (ibid: 14).

Some compulsions to repeat, however, seem not to have the pleasurable component. Children, for instance, repeat ‘displeasurable’ events in order to master them actively (ibid: 29). Freud tells the story of his grandson throwing an object out of sight and then taking it back into view again. With this game of disappearance/appearance the child tries to master the absences of the mother and to take control over her body (ibid: 9-10). Similar to Freud’s grandson, spectators engaging with De Bruyckere’s emaciated and death-like sculptures, may find comfort in this ‘displeasurable’ experience, as it allows them to turn a passive situation into an active one, reducing in this way the tension produced by the absence of knowledge about their own death. De Bruyckere’s sculptures, therefore, can be interpreted not only as a reminder that death is always already present inside the body, but also as a way to come to terms with our own vulnerability and mortality.

Interestingly, according to Freud, pleasure oscillates between two sides; one that constantly tries to find a harmonious balance in the psyche, and the other that pursues pleasure from the repetition of ‘displeasurable’ experiences, in this way, raising the “excitation of the psyche”. This leads Freud to remark that the Ego has “mysterious masochistic trends” (ibid: 8). These masochistic tendencies of the Ego may not be completely unexpected, if we consider that both Freud and Lacan theorise the formation of the Ego as a process of fragmentation. Significantly, the fear of fragmentation plays a defining role in the subject’s life and his identity formation. In fact, the construction of the unified subject always implies body fragmentation, suggesting that tearing apart a body may be a way to create one (Peters, G. 1993: 12).

Even though the subject is trying to maintain the illusionary wholeness of the Ego, the ‘original’ sense of vulnerability and fragmentation will always be present and endangered by the memory of the early sense of incompleteness, which is re-lived through images of dismemberment (Lacan, J. 2006: 85). The persistence of totalising strategies when confronted with images of the body in pieces may, therefore, be interpreted in terms of their restorative function at an unconscious level (Peters, G. 1993: 12). Indeed, spectators confronted with De Bruyckere’s images of broken and dismembered bodies may be reminded of their own physical vulnerability and mortality, but may simultaneously feel relieved for having escaped this inevitable danger once more. As Elisabeth Bronfen explains, representations of death “are pleasing to us because they necessarily depict the death of the other” (Bronfen, E. 1996: x). In

fact, every depiction of the fragmented and suffering body is always a ‘Not-Me’ experience and thus can present the danger of feeling distant and ‘disconnected’, allowing viewers to observe suffering from a safe distance and, therefore, also avoid personally engaging with the ‘pain of others’.

Dismemberment in De Bruyckere’s sculptures might enable viewers to pleurably and safely ‘act-out abjection’ and reinforce the boundaries between life and death, human and not human. This opening up of the borders between bodies and their environment, will not only provide the spectator with the opportunity to safely re-enact the ‘original’ body fragmentation but will also draw attention to the boundaries of knowledge (Kristeva, J. 1982: 4).

De Bruyckere’s sculptures of fragmented and ‘abject’ bodies, point to concerns about subjectivity and inter-subjectivity.²⁰ Drawing on the body’s inherent vulnerability, transience and permeability, her work questions the narrative of subjectivity as self-contained and independent, creating the potential for new forms of knowledge stemming from the uncertainty and messiness of embodiment.

For Kristeva, the reason why people who have experienced emotional distress caused by abjection, seek it out again and again is because the ‘abject’ is like a type of ‘jouissance’ (Kristeva, J. 1982: 9). What attracts the viewer is the ‘jouissance’ of abject encounters, the exhilarating fall inwards into the monstrous depths of the narcissistic self: “The sublime point at which the abject collapses in a burst of that overwhelms us – and ‘that cancels our existence’” (Kristeva, J. 1982: 210). It is important to point out here that the death drive of Freud; the mirror-stage of Lacan; and abjection for Kristeva, are not just phases in child development, but most importantly are never-ending processes which constantly play a role in the formation of subjectivity (Tyler, I. 2009: 80).

For Kristeva, “the abject is edged with the sublime”. She describes the sublime as the ‘thin skin’ of the abject, a type of ‘jouissance’ (Kristeva, J. 1982: 11). Within the abject, a space of conflicts is opened up where contrasting emotions like fear and horror coexist with attraction and beauty. The ‘abject’ or ‘disgusting’ is normally excluded from social interaction, often criticised as morally and aesthetically corrupt, yet the ‘abject’ keeps fascinating viewers in one form or another. This ‘jouissance’, this tension of attraction and repulsion is skilfully recreated in De Bruyckere’s work. Her sculptures are visceral and

²⁰ Abject in the eyes of the spectator.

seductive, aesthetically beautiful and yet unsettling. They depict the body as a place of danger, suffering and death, yet a place of contemplation and beauty at the same time.

Moreover, fragmented objects made aesthetically pleasing can be considered ‘objects without absence’, as they are made whole through the aesthetic process. Fragmentation then stands for adequacy and the sublime, and could be seen to be a reflection of our desire to meet the realness of the body that always escapes signification (Adams, T. 2007). Unlike the Symbolic, in the Lacanian ‘Real’, “there is no absence” (Evans, D. 2006: 162-163). The ‘Real’ is outside language and impossible to imagine. However, the ‘Real’ has also a material side supporting the imaginary and the symbolic. It is this connotation of matter in the realm of the real that links the concept of the real to biology and, therefore, to the biological body (ibid: 162-163). By positioning the physical body in the ‘Real’, the body is transformed into an ‘object without absence’ and points to the fact that the aestheticisation of body fragmentation can be seen as both a restoration and a fracture of symbolic coherence. Body fragmentation can, therefore, be seen as an attempt to mediate between the Symbolic and the Real. In this sense, De Bruyckere’s fragmented figures become a direct imago of the repressed ‘primordial’ fragmented body. Spectators confronted with artworks like *Marthe* (2008) or *Liggende I and II* (2011-2012) may be unconsciously reminded of this earlier state of fragmentation. For a moment, rather than seeing the desired whole body in the mirror, the viewer manages to see the ‘true’ self, the fragmented body.

The aestheticisation of the fragmented body in Berlinde De Bruyckere’s sculptures then, can be seen as another strategy used to cope with the fear of death and the fear of dismemberment. Although, *Liggende I* and *Liggende II* (2011-2012), may cause abjection and uncanny feelings through their materiality and the disturbing way in which the antlers grow and morph within the body, these emaciated and suffering bodies may also be seen as aesthetically beautiful and seductive; evoking concern and empathy. In fact, De Bruyckere’s fragmented and deformed bodies have been often described as seductive and beautiful:

Berlinde De Bruyckere deals with big ideas, but she has this uncanny ability to use them in seductive ways (Duff S. 2013).

In these works, boneless and headless bodies hang vulnerably from pole-like structures fixed off the ground, to the walls. They are as arrestingly beautiful in their carefully-rendered technique and form as they are disturbingly deformed and mutilated in their meaning (Sohal, R. 2011).

Yet it may seem disrespectful to place the words beauty and suffering in the same sentence. Although we have to concede that what is beautiful is always highly personal, we have to acknowledge that in the West, we have inherited a complex set of visual metaphors with which we convey physical and psychic pain, supported by art historical discourses, these visual metaphors have contributed to the intricate connection between ‘the beautiful’ and human suffering.

Moreover, as we have seen in the previous chapter, visual pleasure does not exclude affects such as sorrow and empathy. In the twenty-first century, art critics’ interest in the ‘aestheticisation of objects’ has sustained a shift towards a more ‘sensory-emotional’ experience, merging art with psychology and social science. This supports the usefulness of combining psychoanalytical and affect theories when discussing the reception of the body fragment in sculpture as a way of showing how objects, such as De Bruyckere’s sculptures, may heighten our sense of bodily presence. Aesthetics, therefore, is reinterpreted as a locus of “systematic ordering of sense experience”, which connects art and ‘real events’ through a sense of perception and affective relations (Bennett, J. 2012: 2). Jacques Rancière, for instance, moves away from the idea of aesthetic as a mere theory of art and defines aesthetic as a “distribution of the sensible”. In his view, art’s role is to establish a new type of subjectivity and sense perception (Rancière, J. 2004: 65).

The aestheticisation in De Bruyckere’s figures may be interpreted as an invitation to shift the attention from human suffering to the appreciation of formal qualities in the artwork. In fact, as Susan Sontag writes, aestheticisation may counteract the suffering it initially intended to convey (Sontag, S. 2002: 109). The art historians Abigail Solomon-Godeau and artists such as Allan Sekula (1951-2013), Christian Boltanski (1944-) and Martha Rosler (1943-), have extensively discussed the problem of representing the suffering of others through aesthetically pleasing forms, pointing out the danger of allowing spectators to look at the ‘pain of others’ from a distant and well protected position in which to consume it passively.

Aestheticisation, however, may not always obscure the suffering of others, encouraging passivity and distracting the spectator from the plight of suffering individuals and groups. The aestheticisation critique in fact, which often disapproves of aesthetically pleasing artifacts used to convey human suffering, may underestimate the powerful influence of the bodily devastations and contortions in De Bruyckere’s figures. Christianity, taking particular advantage of the believers’ fears and creating new ones, has constantly reproduced the primordial fear of fragmentation in imagery of wounds and scars, pointing to the mortality and

vulnerability of the human flesh. De Bruyckere's references to Christ's crucifixion and the 'Pietà', together with the formal complexities in her figures, add additional layers of meaning to the representations, enhancing the emotional participation of the spectators by tapping into well-known imagery.²¹ Indeed, the references to Christ's crucifixion may have played a significant role in the artist's choice to utilise a particular aesthetic in depicting human suffering, as the representation of Christ's suffering was supposed to motivate sacrifice and love in the believers. Visual 'beauty' then, may even contribute to the 'shareability' of suffering, uniting as Danto suggests, "the community of mourners" (Danto, A. 2003: 111).

In this chapter, I have argued that De Bruyckere's sculptural representation of the fragmented human body, together with the imaginary power of transformation in Ovid's trope of the metamorphoses, concur to create an ambivalent psychological space; a space in between that cannot immediately be solved and 'rationally understood'. I have shown that this 'in between zone' of experience, where De Bruyckere's work seems to revolve and acquire meaning, focuses attention upon the fragility of the boundaries between the inside and the outside, the 'Me and Not-Me'. This ambivalent and liminal space, where the borders between subject and object are blurred, can create uncomfortable thoughts and emotions in the viewers, influencing the constitution of their subjectivity. This depiction of the body as fragmented, weak and in a state of transformation, however, does not only influence the constitution of the spectator's subjectivity, but also puts the emphasis on the processes of transition, in this way shifting the focus from a static subjectivity to a becoming. I have also pointed to the importance of materiality and form, such as the use of wax and the resemblance to the biological human body in De Bruyckere's sculptures, as possible methods for heightening the involvement and empathy of the spectators and drawing attention to the unstable and frail relationship to the interior/exterior boundaries of the body.

Using Lacan's theory on the formation of the Ego, Freud's notion of the uncanny, and Kristeva's theory of abjection, I have discussed the liminal place in which the spectator could be propelled when confronted with De Bruyckere's sculptures. I have maintained that if the uncanny in De Bruyckere's fragmented figures disrupts the borders between the familiar and unfamiliar or the living and the dead, the object in her work disrupts the same borders

²¹ Hans Holbein's *The Body of the Dead Christ in the Tomb* (1520-1522) could be seen as a key reference for De Bruyckere, both as a model of suffering through the depiction of realistic dead flesh and wounds. For a detail discussion on De Bruyckere's references see chapter six.

referencing blood and flesh. I have shown that repulsion and disavowal play an important role in her sculptures, as they point to the fragility of the human body and highlight events that disturb the boundaries of the subject, threatening in this way the conscious Ego. De Bruyckere's sculptures of fragmented bodies question the border of both subjectivity and inter-subjectivity. In this chapter, I have stated that dismemberment, in De Bruyckere's sculpture, enables viewers to pleasurably and safely 'act-out abjection'. This opening up of the borders between bodies and their environment, not only provides the spectator with the opportunity to safely re-enact the 'original' body fragmentation, but also draws attention to the boundaries of knowledge.

Throughout the chapter, I have emphasised the significance of a debate on the relationship between absence and presence in De Bruyckere's sculptures. The importance of absence, the unseen, what is there but not there, opens up a variety of possible interpretations and transforms the absence of parts of the body into a creative space out of which many new meanings and links emerge.

I have also highlighted the importance of the Freudian death drive in explaining the fascination with 'objects' that inhabit the realm of the unstable and precarious; a place in which the body is in a constant process of change and disintegration. As well as the desire to be repeatedly exposed to these fragmented and crumbling bodies, despite the fact that this contact might cause disquieting feelings.

6 Time Continuity: Christian and Art Historical References in Berlinde De Bruyckere

In this chapter, I will claim that the suffering body of Christ, as well as the Saints and Martyrs, are De Bruyckere's initial visual vocabulary, which she then explores and develops further in her sculptures. Questioning again, as discussed in the previous chapters whether the suffering of a fellow human being can be communicated, shared and visually represented, I will investigate De Bruyckere's communicative strategy of referencing Christ's body in order to render human suffering 'shareable'. I will contend that, in De Bruyckere's artwork, Christian iconography is used as a visual language that is understood and shared by many different cultures. Tracing her use of religious imagery, I will argue that she alludes to Christ's suffering in order to highlight the vulnerability and mortality of human beings, as well as to critique the modern system of values. Moreover, the imagery constituting the main circuit of Catholic visual symbolism also provides a framework of reference to De Bruyckere's artwork.

Special attention will be dedicated to the Christian themes of the 'Pietà' and the Crucifixion, as they have been widely referenced in De Bruyckere's oeuvre in order to criticise the values and conventions in our society. Two exhibitions; 'Berlinde De Bruyckere, Luca Giordano: We are all Flesh' (2009), and her travelling solo museum exhibition 'Into One Another. Berlinde De Bruyckere in Dialogue with Cranach and Pasolini', (March 2011), will form the basis for the debate on how De Bruyckere takes advantage of the continuity, repetition and reverence of the 'religious visual language' in order to communicate with the spectators.

Above all, this chapter will look for patterns and themes that structure the connection between Christian iconography of the body and how this iconographic communicative tool has been translated in De Bruyckere's artwork to represent and convey human suffering.¹ The artist does not consider herself religious, however, she recognises the importance of the religious upbringing she received in a Catholic boarding school, where she spent her formative years. Undeniably, the time that the artist spent in the Catholic boarding school has contributed to the development of aesthetic sensibilities as well as an intellectual understanding and emotive relation to a set of religious images. Indeed, the artist acknowledges:

¹ In this investigation, I will utilise Panofsky's definition of iconography. He defined three stages of analysis, each with its own methodology and goals. The first stage is the pre-iconographic analysis, where the spectator looks at the representation without connecting or referencing it to other sources. In the second stage, called iconographic analysis, the viewer recognises in the image a known story or character. In the third stage of Panofsky's analysis the viewer includes in the interpretation of the image the time and place of production as well as predominant cultural background and artistic style of the time, (Hatt, M & Klonk, C. 2006: 96).

I grew up with religion; I was in a boarding school since I was five years old, living with nuns until I was fourteen. So it's part of me. I don't hide it. It is there and it is still there although I'm not practicing it. I learned a lot of reading in the bible" (De Bruyckere, B. in Bühler, K. 2011).²

I will, however, move away from the idea that the author's background and beliefs have to coincide with a religious reading or understanding of the artwork. I will also move away from a static interpretation of religious symbolism, which may be seen as denying the capacity for change so important to feminist thought and activism. I will instead adopt an approach which suggests that spectators engage with artwork in a participatory way; excluding or repressing undesirable components from their reading and giving prominence to others and, in this way, contributing to the formation of new readings.

6.1 Continuity and Repetition

The history of Western art and the history of Christian thought have often been told and considered interconnected. Indeed, images and coloured sculptures were employed as a way of teaching the Word of God to illiterate people during the early medieval period, (Diebold, W. 2000: 99). This connection between Christian religion and art, with its history and resulting narrative is, however, burdened by controversy. In fact, the role of images as mere substitutes for words is disputed by the fact that images were 'enjoyed' by the literate clerical and secular elite for their ability to convey information that the text could not. As Diebold contends, "images did mimic the word, but at other times, pictures did things that words could not" (Diebold, W. 2000: 71).

Christian iconoclasts considered images and sculptures dangerous and judged them to be an arrogant attempt to equal God's creation; the creation of man in God's own image. Furthermore, images and sculptures could also invite the believer to commit the sin of idolatry, through the venerating of a statue, carving or painting in place of God.³ However, it is in the account of Man, made in the image of God, that the link between Christian narrative,

²Bühler, K. (2011). Interview with Berlinde De Bruyckere. *Kunst Museum Bern*. Available from http://www.kunstmuseumbern.ch/admin/data/hosts/kmb/files/page_editorial_paragraph_file/file_en/12/111019_Interview_De_Bruyckere.pdf?lm=1321628636 [Accessed 20.03.2015].

³The early Christian Church welcomed several pagan's beliefs and customs, such as the adoration of figures and idols, as a way to draw more people to the new religion. Both iconoclasts and iconodules agreed that to secure the success of the Christian Religion the attitude towards the icon had to change. There was however, disagreement in defining what the attitude towards the religious icon should be. The iconoclast, based their credo on the second commandment "you shall not make any idols" and considered the use of images and icons in a religious context a sin, whereas the iconodules supported the use of icons in their veneration, (Cunliffe-Jones, H. 2006: 195).

iconography and the body has its origin (Genesis 1:26-27). In the Western tradition, “the idea of incarnation legitimises the representation of the body” (Koenot, J. in Baert, B. 2009: 6). The concept of incarnation in human form makes the invisible divine nature, visible and representable. Christ represents both the invisible and divine side of the Father as well as the visible and human side. It is through the incarnation of Christ that “the representation of ugliness [is] possible”, as it is used to render Christ’s humanity (Korff Sausse, S. 2015:47).

Christian imagery and narrative is omnipresent in the West, especially in countries where Catholicism is the main religion. In these Catholic countries, it is not unusual to find shrines dedicated to the Virgin Mary, Jesus on the cross or one of the Saints, in the most unexpected and remote places. From an early age, children are exposed to the representation of martyred bodies and, supposedly, real body parts of deceased Saints collected in crypts as a direct connection to the body of exceptional human beings in religious terms. The type of representation that connects Christian iconography and narratives to pain and suffering enters people’s consciousness from an early age and becomes part of everyday life. De Bruyckere’s sculptures of fragmented, dislocated and disembowelled bodies are deeply rooted in this Christian tradition, as they are evocative of Saints and flagellated and stigmatised Martyrs.

6.1.1 The Pietà

De Bruyckere’s figures can be seen as secular objects functioning within Christian culture, as they often reference Christ’s suffering on the cross. In the late 2000s, she produced a series of sculptures referencing the theme of pity, (images 6-1; 6-4). The tradition of the Pietà originates in Germany as a ‘contemplative station’ between the crucifixion and the entombment of Jesus, in which the believer takes time to meditate and contemplate Christ’s suffering and venerate his regenerative or redemptive wound (Schiller, G. 1972: 179).

De Bruyckere’s sculpture series of *Pietà* and *Schmerzmann* (2006) (image 6-18), seem to be inspired by the paintings of Lucas Cranach the Elder (1472-1553).⁴ As Jeremy Howard reports, many contemporary artists have been inspired by Cranach’s religious paintings and

⁴ Lucas Cranach the Elder is considered to be one of the most important painters of the Reformation. Born in 1472 in Kronach, he learned painting at his father’s shop. During the first two decades of the sixteenth century, Cranach’s workshop was very successful. The painter was commissioned to decorate places with mythological themes and to paint portraits of noblemen and women. During the Reformation, Cranach assumed the role of a “pictorial propagandist”. In 1519 he designed the first Protestant flyer. Cranach developed a friendly relationship with Martin Luther and he is credited as having painted an enormous number of Luther’s portraits. It is around 1530 that an “independent Protestant iconography” started to appear in his paintings (Brinkmann, B. 2007: 18-22). Cranach was known for using various painting techniques. For some figures for instance he used a multi-layered application of paint, (Heidenreich, G. in Brinkmann, B. 2007: 42-44).

“this is seen most movingly in the work of the Belgian artist Berlinde De Bruyckere, whose work takes its cue from Cranach” (Howard, J. 2009).⁵



6-1: Berlinde De Bruyckere, *Pietà*, 2008, wax, epoxy, metal and wood

In several interviews, De Bruyckere states that she particularly admires the sensual intensity and psychological depth of Cranach's characters. She especially appreciates the way Cranach expresses emotional states, such as fear, passion and doubt, through the body of his figures (Theys, H. 2011: 22).

Although the skin colour and the representation of the body may have been inspired by Cranach's *Pietà* (1510) reproduced below (image 6-2), the similarity between De Bruyckere's *Pietà* and Michelangelo's *Pietà Rondanini* (1564) is clearly evident.⁶ Similar to

⁵ Howard, J. (2009). Cranach. *Colnaghi, Exhibition Catalogue*. Available from http://www.colnaghi.co.uk/sites/default/files/publications/Cranach_Catalogue.pdf [Accessed 26.03.2015].

⁶ Lucas Cranach's 'Pietà' (6-2) is often discussed in connection to the Reform, focusing on the notion of "art as a gift", (Nagel, A. 2000 143-85). The drawings or paintings then become the validation on earth of the spiritual ideals, which are communicated by the coming together of the story and the image of the Man of Sorrows, (ibid: 170).

Michelangelo's *Pietà Rondanini* (image 6-3), where both Mary and Christ are represented standing, De Bruyckere's *Pietà* (image 6-1) portrays two upright figures merged together.⁷



6-2: **Lucas Cranach**, *Pietà beneath the Cross*, (circa 1510)

In Michelangelo's sculpture, the two figures emerge from the same marble, conveying a sense of indivisibility. Although the incomplete condition of Michelangelo's *Pietà* may consent to a more personal or diverse reading of the sculpture, the unfinished face of Christ seems to draw attention to Mary's expression of sorrow (Viladesau, R. 2008: 238). In Michelangelo's *Pietà Rondanini*, Mary, who is placed at a higher level, supports the dead Christ against her body and seems to be captured in the act of gently placing the body of her son on the ground after being taken down from the cross.

⁷ Michelangelo started 'La Pietà Rondanini' in 1455 and art historians report that he spent his last days working on it. Considered unfinished by many, this sculpture is seen as a shift in style as it differs from anything he created before, (Viladesau, R. 2008: 238; De Girolami-Cheney, G. 1997: 198). Michelangelo, in 'La Pietà Rondanini', dismissed the imitation and formal idealisation of Nature. As Max Dvorak asserts: "The mystery of that death which sets men free has brought upon the artist an inner upheaval and to build the figures, not from the outside inwards, but from the inside outwards, as if the body were possessed by the spirit. There is no looking back. The sense of life and of death which permeates the figures does not depend on earlier ideals of spacious beauty and faithfulness to nature", (ibid: 200).



6-3: **Michelangelo Buonarroti**, *La Pietà Rondanini*, 1564

In De Bruyckere's *Pietà* (2007), however, (image 6-1), the figure behind, even though in a very unstable way, is the only contact with the ground and carries, like a burden, the whole weight against the body. The figure on the top is defenceless, vulnerable, and completely dependent on the support, maybe both physically and emotionally, of the standing figure. As De Bruyckere comments, "the one on top is much more exposed than the one below. The one underneath has to take care of the other. Loneliness and the taking care of each other are the two messages that I try to explain" (De Bruyckere, B. in Bühler, K. 2011). For the artist, the ability to tend to and to love somebody is paramount in finding a shared language with which to communicate pain, suffering and fear. In fact, she contends:

I'm always very sad, when people are thinking that it's all about death. No, you don't look carefully, because the part of life is even more important than the part of death. Life is beautiful even if we have to deal with fear and pain. It makes it easier if we take care of each other and if we have a language with each other to communicate about pain, suffering and fear. If we don't then it's not possible to live anymore.⁸

⁸ Bühler, K. (2011). Interview with Berlinde De Bruyckere: Mysterium Leib. Berlinde De Bruyckere im Dialog mit Lucas Cranach und Pier Paolo Pasolini. *Kunst Museum Bern*, 17 October 2011. Available from http://www.kunstmuseumbern.ch/admin/data/hosts/kmb/files/page_editorial_paragraph_file/file_en/12/111019_Interview_De_Bruyckere.pdf?lm=1321628636 [Accessed 20.03.2015].



6-4: **Berlinde De Bruyckere**, *Pietà*, 2007, wax glass, wood, iron, epoxy, 242 x 58 x 85.5 cm

This dependence may be interpreted as the need for each other and the need for the support of other people, but it can also imply the suffering that human beings inflict upon each other. The sculpture may then be interpreted as the physical pain inflicted on other people and, as Freud stated, the pain inflicted by the loved one is the most awful of pain (Freud, S. 2010: 28).

Indeed, when De Bruyckere is referencing the ‘Pietà’ she is expressing sorrow for the flesh. Flesh that, although distorted and dissipated beyond imagination, as in the 2007 *Pietà* (image 6-4). The artist’s choice of the title ‘Pity’ for her sculptures not only refers to the suffering of the mother for the murdered son, and serves to create a link between the contemporary artwork and previous artistic and religious interpretations on the same theme, but it also makes the viewer aware of the shared responsibility in Christ’s death. This shared culpability plays an important role in Christian teaching.⁹

⁹ Jesus said, “forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing”, (Luke 23:34).

“For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God”, (Corinthians 5:21)

One could, therefore, suggest that every “representation of the ‘Pietà’, reveals an emotional tie, a fertile anxiety over the injustice inflicted on Christ”, (Paparoni, D. 2007: 27). In the artwork of many contemporary artists, as in Berlinde De Bruyckere’s artwork shown above (image 6-1; 6-4), the theme of the ‘Pietà’ becomes an emblematic symbol of the unjust and indiscriminate suffering that human beings are capable of inflicting upon fellow human beings.

As discussed above new interpretations of an artwork are formed when viewers exclude undesirable components from their reading and give prominence to others that may remind them of a particular and perhaps well known story, (Jenkins, 2006: 4). De Bruyckere’s *Pietà* (image 6-1 and 6-4), for instance, may be reminiscent for some viewers, of the sad story of ‘Paolo e Francesca’ told in Dante’s *Divina Commedia*. Paolo and Francesca were the characters of a forgotten tragic event that, before Dante Alighieri immortalised them in his epic poem, faded into the indifference of the chronicle of the time. The story tells us that Giovanni Malatesta, Francesca’s apparently physically deformed husband, killed her in an honour killing when he caught her ‘in flagrante’ with Paolo, his younger and good looking brother. (Cusani, E. 1993: 138).

In canto V of the *Inferno*, Dante tells the story of Paolo and Francesca, two lovers-adulterers who were damned for eternity in hell’s second circle because of their lust. Dante, placing the lustful just after the ‘limbo’, which is the place of punishment for unconsciously committed sins, tells us that in his view, this type of sin is the least offensive to God (Ciccia, C. 2012: 98). In fact, the only mistake Paolo and Francesca made, was to love; the true and complete love in which, as dictated by the ‘dolce stil novo’, even the physical possession of the loved one responds to an intimate spiritual need, rather than a physical craving.¹⁰

Paolo and Francesca are in fact sinful lovers, who remain together in the vortex of the storm from hell. Their desire to be united, even if sinful, has been granted, as their bodies will be united for eternity. However, this desire is the cause of much physical pain. Pain inflicted on the body of the loved one, which as a consequence, produces emotional suffering in the one causing the physical pain. The wickedness of the punishment inflicted on Paolo and

¹⁰ “Mentre che l’uno spirto questo disse, / l’altro piangea, sic he di pietate / io venni men così com’io morisse; e caddi come corpo morto cade”, (Alighieri, D. *Inferno* V 139-142 in Alighieri, D. 1983: 43).

Dante seems to feel pity for the damned in the second circle, whereas in other ‘canti’ he does not show any mercy. Although Dante himself justifies this attitude by saying that he is still close to the earth and therefore still carries earthly feelings and weaknesses, his fainting points to the fact that the poet proves pity towards these poor souls, as he may have committed the same sin himself, (Alighieri, D. 1983: 43).

Francesca, originates from the fact that these two lovers are damned to cause pain to each other for eternity.

With this story in mind, when viewing De Bruyckere's sculptures entitled *Pietà* (images 6-1 and 6-4), some spectators may give prominence to the interpretation of human beings causing pain to other human beings, overlooking the inference of the need for support and love for each other. In this way, suffering can be interpreted as both physical and emotional.



6-5: Michelangelo Buonarroti, *Pietà*, 1498-1499

Michelangelo produced his first version of the *Pietà* (1498-1499), known as the representation of the mother of Christ with her dead son on her lap, in his youth. He sculpted the Virgin Mary holding the dead body of her son just moments after it was taken down from the cross. In the 'Pietà', the representation of the Mystery of Christ's sacrificial death on the cross to save humanity, recalls the mystery of his incarnation (Schiller, G. 1972: 180). In both mysteries, incarnation and death, Christ is often depicted sitting or lying on the Virgin Mary's lap, as can be seen in Michelangelo *Pietà* (image 6-5) or in Pier Paolo Pasolini's film still photograph (image 6-6).¹¹

¹¹ The connection between Pasolini's film 'Il Vangelo secondo Matteo' (1964) and De Bruyckere's figures will be discussed in section 4.4.



6-6: **Pasolini, P.P.**, *Il Vangelo Secondo Matteo*, 1964

In De Bruyckere's *Pietà* (image 6-7), a deadly pale, naked body of a man is supported by thick and soft padding placed upon two wooden stools. Although the body is fragmented and lacks head and arms, there is no blood spilling out through the openings left by the missing limbs. The wound is surgically clean and becomes a black hole.¹² Removing the dramatic colour of blood from the dead body, De Bruyckere follows the path set by artists such as Michelangelo, who searched for a "more intellectual form of *pietà*, in which the perfection of 'disegno' reflects God's perfection", and in which the martyred body carries this physical suffering with dignity (D'Elia, U.R. 2006). De Bruyckere borrows this symbolism of the suffering body from the Christian tradition of representing suffering and flesh, its sentience, vulnerability and mortality. De Bruyckere's series of the '*Pietà*', through its indexicality, materiality and citations, connects Christian traditions and past artworks in order to address contemporary existential questions.

There is, however, the significant absence of the Virgin Mary in De Bruyckere's *Pietà*. Although the artist embeds several pillows to support and protect the mutilated body, the mother's love and support is completely missing. In many devotional sculptures of the '*Pietà*', the Madonna may be seen as mediating between Man and God. Pure, loving and devoted, she conveys suffering through her transfigured and sorrowful expression. In Michelangelo's *Pietà*, for instance, (image 6-5), the Virgin mother attends to her child with love and devotion. In Cranach's *Pietà at the Cross*, (1510) (image 6-2), the Mother of God holds her dead son in her arms with sorrow and tenderness. In De Bruyckere's *Pietà* (image 6-7), the mother and her love are missing. The pillows may function as transitional objects, as substitutes for the mother's body nonetheless, there is a palpable sense of loneliness exuding from this artwork.

¹² See chapter seven.

The body, even though gently placed on soft cushions, is isolated and deprived of human contact, pointing to the detrimental influence that loneliness can have on the physical and mental wellbeing of all human beings.



6-7: **Berlinde De Bruyckere**, *Pietà*, 2007-2008, wax, epoxy, metal wood and cushions
80 x 110 x 180 cm

Considered to be a “universal and shared symbol of humanity”, the ‘Pietà’ has been adopted by many contemporary artists, (Friswell, R. 2012).¹³ In Western contemporary art and culture, this Christian theme becomes a communication tool that draws attention to society’s systems and values, exposing established and accepted patterns of conduct and activities that influence our behaviour and understanding. De Bruyckere, utilise Christian iconography, because it is instantly recognised and understood by a large number of people, thus making the artwork accessible to audiences with a Christian background but perhaps belonging to different cultures or nationalities.

However, we may question the need for a Christian background with which to understand images of a grieving mother holding her dead son. Every human being, completely independent from their background and religion, will be able to interpret these types of images. Richard Friswell, in his article, ‘The Pietà’: Universal and Renewable Symbol of

¹³ Igaël Tumarkin, *Pietà Rondanini*, 1987; Marina Abramovic: *Pietà*, 2002; Sam Taylor-Wood: *Pietà*, 2001; Atelier Van Lieshout: *Caretaker*, 2005.

Shared Humanity’, claims that Samuel Aranda’s photograph, which won the 2011 World Press Photo Award, succeeded in overcoming cultural differences and communicating the fact that we all share similar emotions and fears, through its referencing of the theme of the ‘Pietà’, (Friswell, R. 2012).



6-8: **Samuel Aranda**, 2011. Winner of the 2011’s World Press Photo.

6.1.2 The Return of the Religious or the ‘Postmodern Sacred’

The history of modern art has often been understood as being completely separate from Christianity, echoing the modernist thesis that through the secularisation of society, art and religion have grown apart (Paparoni, D. 2007: 19). This separation or disconnection between Christianity and art also highlights the shift from a ‘unifying’ cultural and religious ideology to a more fragmentary and individualistic vision of the world. Habermas calls a society in which Christianity is substituted by a global, fast paced and expanding modernisation, a “post-secular society” (Habermas, J. 2008)¹⁴. From the eighteenth century, the relationship between art and Christianity underwent considerable changes caused by the Reformation, the rise of capitalism, the ideals of the Enlightenment, and the cult of ‘rationality’, (Fishman, A. 2004:

¹⁴ Habermas, J, (2008). *Secularism’s Crisis of Faith: Notes on Post-Secular Society*. Available from <http://www.staff.amu.edu.pl/~ewa/Habermas,%20Notes%20on%20Post-Secular%20Society.pdf> [Accessed 30.04.2015].

2).¹⁵ The feeling of withdrawal of the divine expressed by the Romantic artists, and the announcement of the death of God by Nietzsche in the late nineteenth century, combined with Marxism, psychoanalytic-, and scientific development, led to a reconsideration of the place of human beings in relation to the ‘Creation’ and, therefore, in relation to Christianity as a whole (Habermas, J. 2008).

Yet God seems to have outlived Nietzsche’s predicted death. God and Christianity survived the indifference of Western secular society; hence, religious sensibilities are still pervading and profoundly shaping culture, (Zimmermann, J. 2012: 22; Wilson, E. 2012: 101). As Giovanni Vattimo writes: “While our civilisation no longer professes itself Christian but rather considers itself by and large dechristianised, post-Christian, it is nevertheless, profoundly shaped by that heritage at its source” (Vattimo, G. 1999: 43). According to Jean Luc Nancy, it is not possible to think about Western secular society without acknowledging the fact that contemporary Western society has its origin in Christianity (Nancy, J.L. 2008: 140). The Christian narrative, therefore, is always inherently informing Western thought. Taking atheism as an example, Nancy explains that atheism can only be explained in connection to religion, as only religion makes the concept of atheism possible. Therefore, “The only thing that can be actual is an atheism that contemplates the reality of its Christian origins” (Nancy, J.L. 2008: 140).

Habermas in his 2008 article: ‘Notes on a Post-Secular Society’, also rethinks his secularist thesis and acknowledges the “resurgence of religion”.¹⁶ For McAvan the “postmodern sacred consists of texts that are consumed in part for their spiritual content, for an experience of the transcendent ambivalently situated on the boundary of formal religious and spiritual traditions” (McAvan, E. 2012: 6).

Sociologists attribute this new relevance of Christian religion in all areas of society to the postmodern collapse of the scientific meta-narratives, the effect of globalisation, the doubting attitude towards biogenetics, and the 9/11 attack on New York, in 2001 (McAvan, E. 2014: 1-4; Paparoni, D. 2007: 19).

It is also important to highlight that the sacred is not a static entity but is constantly modified through the interaction of culture, media, and the virtual. The return of the sacred

¹⁵ For Max Weber at the heart of modernisation lies the substitution of mysticism promoting collective identities with scientific rationalisation and intellectualisation, (Weber, M. 2008: 35).

¹⁶ Jürgen Habermas ascribes the resurgence of Christian religion to geo-political events, such as missionary expansion, fundamentalist radicalisation and the potential implicit violence in some of the world religions, Habermas, J. (2008). *Secularism’s Crisis of Faith: Notes on Post-Secular Society*. Available from <http://www.staff.amu.edu.pl/~ewa/Habermas,%20Notes%20on%20Post-Secular%20Society.pdf> [Accessed 16.03.2015].

then, implies a return of a different sacred, one that has been influenced by the cultural shift of the last fifty years (McAwan, E. 2014: 3). Has this ‘return of the sacred’ influenced contemporary art, changing the way Christian iconography is used outside of the religious narrative in the twenty-first century? Could this shift be connected, consciously or unconsciously, to the religious and political motivated terrorist attacks? Controversial debates about the Catholic Church, Middle East policy, and Islam indicate that religion is seen, now more than ever, as an integral part of cultural identity. A return Religious appurtenance then, becomes an important part of the individual’s and the nation’s cultural identity. De Bruyckere also comments that:

We used to have certainties of faith and tradition, but now we are all looking for rules, norms or a purpose to help us survive in this world, although we are always left wondering if they are the right ones (De Bruyckere, B. in Theys, H. 2011: 26).

Contemporary art, as Martha Buskirk explains, has witnessed a renegotiation of past artistic practices and an explosion in appropriation of specific art works, (Buskirk, M. 2005: 112, 114). In her view, the introduction of the ready-made in the 1950s and 1960s can already be seen as an early indication of the “postmodern play with reference and quotations from a range of art as well as non-art sources”, (Buskirk, M. 2005: 110). The last three decades, however, were not only characterised by the intensification of quotations and the repositioning of the human body in art discourses, but they also saw an upsurge in the use of religious references for non-religious purposes, (Beart, B and Van Gelder, H. 2006: vii).

Art historians, curators and visual artists have acknowledged an important movement in art over the last thirty years of engaging with religious topics and religious iconography. However, there is still disagreement about the degree and importance of Christianity and its symbols in contemporary art (Paparoni, D. 2007: 61; Nagel, A. 2012: 9; Alexandrova, A. 2008: 772). What in the 1980s and 1990s started as a ‘timid’ desire for transcendence in the arts, during the last decade seems to have become a need to tackle topics related to Christianity, such as human sacrifice, suffering, atonement and mortality’ (Paparoni, D. 2007: 19).

The recent increase in the number of exhibitions devoted to religious themes can be interpreted as another indicator of the renewed interest in Christianity and religious

iconography in contemporary art.¹⁷ However, contemporary artists reference religious symbols without the need for questions of belief and denomination. Religious symbols in the postmodern virtual reality are often disconnected from their context, (McAvan, E. 2012: 5). The heterogeneity of the artwork quoting religious themes or forms makes it difficult to discuss this type of work as a single category. However, what contemporary artworks that reference Christian iconography have in common, is the fact that these artworks are not interpreted or used in a religious context, and even when they are exhibited in a church, they are not considered to be ‘religious art’

6.2 Reverence

Christianity and the way religious images should be used within both a religious and non-religious context, has recently been a matter of debate, as the attack on the French satirical newspaper Charlie Hebdo, bears testimony (BBC News, 2015).¹⁸ Christian iconography and its use still provokes strong reactions. It is in countries with a strong religious heritage especially, where religious imagery is considered sacred and, therefore, treated with respect and reverence, that distorting or parodying will raise strong emotional reactions. De Bruyckere appropriates Christian theme and iconography in a ‘non-transgressive’ way not only to access a well know vocabulary of pain and suffering in countries with a Christian background, but also access the absorbing sentiments of awe, mystery, reverence and respect that these religious symbols may inspire.

Some art historical research has been devoted to investigating the connections between religious imagery for its spiritual content in art, or the use of religious iconography for its transgressive purposes in contemporary art (Elkins, J. 2004: 15). However, categorising the

¹⁷ In 1995, for instance, Eleonora Louis and Christoph Geissmar-Brandi organised the exhibition: ‘Glaube, Hoffnung, Liebe, Tod’, and Bruno Latour in 2002, curated: ‘Iconoclash’, (Nagel, A. 2012: 13). In 2006, the first Singapore Biennale was entitled, ‘Belief’, and artists were invited to investigate the beliefs behind different ways of life, (Nanjo, F. 2006). In the 2008-2009 exhibition: ‘Medium Religion’ at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Karlsruhe, Germany, religion was combined with the fast moving medial reproduction. In 2008, the Centre Pompidou in Paris brought together works by 200 international artists under the heading: ‘Traces du Sacré’. Through a wide selection of paintings, sculptures, installations and videos spanning from the eighteenth century to the present day, the exhibition aimed to question the notion that the origin of modern art lies in the changed relationship between man and religion. Instead, the curator of the exhibition, Jean de Loisy, argued that even though the secularisation of society released artists from their subjection to the churches, the religious crisis did not mean the disappearance of metaphysical questioning. On the contrary, the persistence of this questioning throughout the twentieth century seemed to be an indispensable key to understanding the history of modern art, (De Loisy, J. 2008).

¹⁸ On the 7th of January 2015 Islamic terrorists attacked Charlie Hebdo, a French satirical newspaper, and killed 12 people for drawing and therefore insulting the Prophet Muhammad, (BBC News Europe, (2015). Charlie Hebdo: Gun attack on French Magazine kills 12. *BBC*, 7 January 2015. Available from <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-30710883> [Accessed 09.03.2015].

use of Christian iconography in contemporary art into transgressive and non-transgressive may be problematic, due to the fact that the artist's intention may differ from the spectator's understanding.

Transgressive religious artwork often incurs violent critique, censure and even destruction. Andres Serrano, for instance, in 1987 produced a photograph titled *Piss Christ* (image 6-9), which was described by politicians and journalists as “a plastic crucifix submerged in the artist's own urine” (Siedell, D. 2015: 97). However, the photograph features Jesus on the cross in a brilliant yellow light. The image “looks like a giant still from a religious film” and has been described as “aesthetically beautiful” (Nieder Korn, 1989).¹⁹ The image was one of thirteen other photographs in the series, ‘Immersion’ (1987-90), all of which represented classical statuettes immersed in bodily fluids, such as blood, semen, milk, and urine. The content of the image and the title's allusion of pissing on Christ caused heated controversy and “became an icon for the bloody culture wars of the early 1990s” (Siedell, D. 2015: 96).²⁰



6-9: **Andres Serrano**, *Piss Christ*, 1987

¹⁹ Nieder Korn, W. (1989). The Man Behind A Controversy Andres Serrano, Who Uses Bodily Fluids As Elements In Some Of His Works, Defends His Depiction Of Jesus Against The Campaigns And Rhetoric Of Politicians. *The Inquirer*, 26 August 1989. Available from http://articles.philly.com/1989-08-26/news/26148343_1_jesus-picture-works [Accessed 10.03.2015].

²⁰ The Southeastern Center for Contemporary Art (SECCA) in 1988, gave \$15000 to Serrano to create work to be exhibited alongside the work of nine other artists. The problems started when, after the exhibition had been shown without controversy in Los Angeles, Pittsburgh and Richmond, Rev. Donald Wildmon wrote a complaint letter to the Congress, that then inspired Jesse Helms in his actions against the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), (Siedell, D. 2015: 97).

Piss Christ was caught at the centre of the debates about the funding of the Arts in the United States, when Senator D'Amato ripped up a reproduction of the work in the Senate (Warner-Marien, M. 2006: 448). Senator D'Amato addressed the Senate on 18th May 1989, stating that “shocked, outraged and angered” voters regarding the “deplorable, despicable display of vulgarity” in Serrano’s photograph, *Piss Christ*, had contacted him.²¹ Jesse Helms, in his letter, described the work as “sickening, abhorrent and a shocking act by an arrogant blasphemer” (Dubin, S. C. 1994: 97). In October 1997, ‘Piss Christ’ was exhibited in Victoria, Australia, where it was subject to two attacks. In the first attack, the photograph was removed from the wall and kicked by a viewer. In the second attack, one of the attackers kicked the portraits of a Ku Klux Klan follower whilst the other, hit *Piss Christ* eight times with a hammer, as they considered the exhibition “racist and blasphemous”. The exhibition closed shortly after, raising questions about censorship and freedom of expression (Art Crimes, 1997).²²

The photograph *Piss Christ*, continues to inhabit a controversial space, one in which images are attacked for what viewers, in this case Catholic viewers, believe they represent. As mentioned above, through the interaction with viewers and their ability to convey several meanings at the same time, images can give rise to ambivalence and conflicts. In April 2011, in Avignon, for instance, four men attacked Serrano’s work. The destruction of images points to the exaggerated power ascribed to these images.²³ In 2012, the photograph *Piss Christ*, which was part of a retrospective exhibition ‘Body and Spirit: Andres Serrano 1987-2012’, was seen as “an orchestrated effort to undermine Western Culture and Christianity”, (Siedell, D. 2015: 97, 100). These critiques demonstrate the persistent misunderstanding surrounding images that refer to religious content or form, as being imbued with religious ‘truth’. This confusion dates back to the iconoclastic controversy in Byzantine times, which attributed idolatrous status to religious images and sculptures. Furthermore, the image of Christ is central to the Christian narrative for dying on the cross to save humanity and also for being physical proof of ‘God’s existence’. For these reasons, Christians may react very strongly if they feel that the image of Christ has been vandalised or misappropriated.

²¹ D’Amato, A. (1989). Congressional Record. *Senate May 18*. [online] Available from: <http://web.csulb.edu/~jvancamp/361_r7.html> [Accessed 10.03.2015].

²² Art Crimes (1997). *Piss Christ*: The National Gallery of Victoria, Australia. *Art Crimes*, 12 October 1997. Available from: <<http://www.artcrimes.net/piss-christ>> [Accessed 10.03.15].

²³ This can also be noted in the destruction of the Buddhas of Bamiyan statues in Afghanistan at the hands of the Taliban in 2001.

A similar act of vandalism was carried out in 1999, on the African artist Chris Ofili's (1968-) *The Holy Virgin Mary* (image 6-10). Ofili's work caused controversy and heated debate for using elephant dung and pornographic images of women's genitalia for his representation of the mother of Christ. The painting was shown at the Brooklyn Museum of Art in New York, in December 1999, as part of an exhibition entitled 'Sensation', which had already been exhibited in 1997 at the Royal Academy of Art in London, and at the Berlin Hamburger Bahnhof museum in 1998. The exhibition was then shown in New York at the Brooklyn Museum of Art in 1999, where, even before its opening, Ofili's work was criticised as Catholic-bashing and displayed his disapproval by throwing horse manure at the museum's outside walls. During the exhibition, Dennis Heiner, a retired teacher, devout Catholic, and pro-life activist, threw and smeared paint over Ofili's painting of the Virgin Mary, as he considered it blasphemous, (Art Crimes, 1999).²⁴ However, the man in image 6-10 is attacking the face of a 'Black Mary' and not the elephant dung or the genitalia used to create the image. The extreme reaction to Ofili's Mary may then be connected to racism, because what has been felt as blasphemous is the representation of Mary, the mother of Christ, as a black woman.



6-10: **Chris Ofili's** 'Holy Virgin Mary'
being sprayed with white paint by retired teacher Dennis Heiner in New York

The strong feelings towards a perceived lack of respect towards religious imagery, can be seen as the result of a long tradition of worship, reverence and acceptance that places religious

²⁴ Art Crimes. (1999). Holy Virgin Mary: Brooklyn Museum of Art, New York, *Art Crimes*, 16 December 1999. Available from <http://www.artcrimes.net/holy-virgin-mary> [Accessed 11.03.2015].

icons at the centre of Christian practice, as physical and tangible connections between Man and God. The representation becomes the visual expression of the Christian doctrine. In fact, “the images represented by the icons are intended to evoke and express truth, and to open a ‘window’ to transcendence” (Espin, O. and Nickoloff, J. 2007: 991). On the other side the ‘Sensation’ exhibition was a prime example for the beginning of ‘shock art’.²⁵ Shock art was not only a crowd puller for museums that lacked visitors but it also opened debates about certain topics such as religion, beliefs, and freedom of expression.

6.3 Time Continuity

As discussed at the beginning of this chapter, the appropriation of Christian iconography in the artworks of De Bruyckere may not cause violent controversy but still provokes an intense emotive engagement. Alina Alexandrova, for instance, describes De Bruyckere’s sculptures as art that “appropriate critically religious motifs without being seen as scandalous”, (Alexandrova, A. 2008: 775). When artistic works translate and transform sacred symbols into the language of secular art, as Berlinde De Bruyckere’s do, it is not necessarily considered to be an act of vandalism or a critique of the sacred.

In Berlinde De Bruyckere’s representations of fragmented figures, there are clear echoes of both Christian iconography and of the representation of Christian themes. Medieval and Renaissance Christian art is another important source of inspiration, as for example, to realistically capture the colour and translucency of the human skin she studied in depth the naked painted figures of medieval painters, like Caravaggio, (Burley, I. 2012). In several interviews, the artist acknowledges her affinity and interest in the paintings of ‘old masters’, stating that she first learned the ‘language of the body’ from Flemish painters, such as Hans Memling and Rogier van der Weyden.²⁶

Many artists make use of Christian iconography, which through its temporal span and geographical reach becomes a communicative instrument that is available and understood by a vast number of people; a language, as discussed in the Literature Review, with which to convey ‘pathos’.²⁷ Language itself is based on symbols and rituals. Christian rituals and

²⁵ Shock Art has been the name given by critics to the "Sensation" exhibition between the 18th of September and the 28th of December at the Royal academy of Art, curated by Norman Rosenthal, where he presented many works of the Young British Artists (YBAs). Consequently a lot of art works of this exhibition plus similar art works had been named shock art.

²⁶ Coghlan, A. (2012). In the Flesh: Berlinde De Bruyckere. *The Monthly*, July 2012. Available from <http://www.themonthly.com.au/issue/2012/july/1346119165/alexandra-coghlan/flesh> [Accessed 21.03.2015].

²⁷ See Spretnak, C. (2014). *The Spiritual Dynamic in Modern Art: Art History Reconsidered, 1800 to the Present*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan.

symbols can, therefore, be considered to be parts within the myriad of rituals and symbols used by human beings in order to organise and make sense of their lives, (Cooke, B. and Macy, G. 2005: 4, 6). Even in a multi-cultural and post-Christian society, the Christian belief system, and its iconography, still functions as an important frame of reference. Christian iconography contains extensive philosophical and ideological meaning, narratives and interpretations that have influenced religious imagery in the West for centuries. These stories, meanings and images, as in the case of the crucifixion, are well known and are constantly reproduced in books, films and popular publications relating to art history. Contemporary works of art referencing religious iconography, therefore, make full use of a visual language and of stories well known to the vast majority of spectators in the West.

6.3.1 Past Perfect: The Knowledge of the Past

In 2009, Berlinde De Bruyckere prepared two solo exhibitions in which she presented her artwork juxtaposed with the work of Benedetto da Majano and Luca Giordano.²⁸ As shown in chapter three, the artist creates a link between the spectators' bodily reality and her sculptures through the realistic reproduction of parts of the human body and the precise reproduction of the colour of the skin.

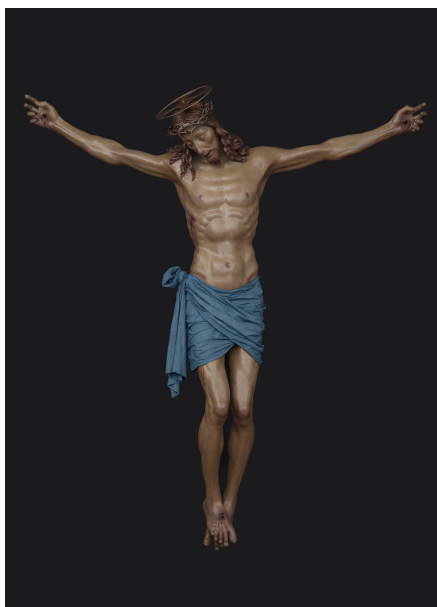


6-11: Berlinde De Bruyckere, *Per Benedetto*, 2009, wax, wood, iron, epoxy

²⁸ Berlinde De Bruyckere's solo exhibitions in 2009: Spedale di Santa Fina, 'Berlinde De Bruyckere in dialogue with Benedetto da Maiano (1442-1497)', San Gimignano, Italy.

Hauser & Wirth Colnaghi, 'Berlinde De Bruyckere – Luca Giordano. We Are All Flesh' in London, where she presented her artwork alongside two paintings of Luca Giordano: *Saint Bartholomew* and *Prometheus Bound* (both made circa 1660).

The Museum of the Conservatory of Santa Chiara San Gimignano (Siena) hosted the exhibition ‘Benedetto da Maiano, a San Gimignano la riscoperta di un crocifisso dimenticato’, to mark the rediscovery of a forgotten crucifix (1442-1497). The forgotten crucifix is believed to be one of several sculptures of Christ on the cross, produced by one of Michelangelo’s masters, Benedetto da Majano.²⁹ The restoration of the work discovered the original extraordinary beauty of the polychrome wood, which had been obscured by the thick layer of bronze painted over it in the nineteenth century, (Comunicato Stampa: Opera di Santa Maria del Fiore, 2009).



6-12: **Benedetto da Maiano**, after 4 years of restoration

In conjunction with the restoration of Benedetto Da Majano’s crucifix, The City Council, in collaboration with Galleria Continua in Siena, commissioned De Bruyckere to create a new artwork for the ‘Spedale di Santa Fina’. For this exhibition the artist produced a wax sculpture entitled ‘Per Benedetto’ (2009) (image 6-11), in which a man appears to crouch in a painful spasm; emaciated, silent and painfully vulnerable. In this sculpture, the skin is pale and deathlike, and calls to mind the fragility and transience of human existence.

The perfect anatomical proportions, (approximately 170 cm high) in Da Majano’s Christ on the cross, as well as the warmth of life in the skin of his Christ, indicates the artist’s interest in anatomy and the proportions of the human body that was typical of the Renaissance, (Comunicato Stampa: Opera di Santa Maria del Fiore, 2009). De Bruyckere, through the

²⁹ ArsKey (2009). Crocifisso Riscoperto a Nuova Scultura di Berlinde De Bruyckere a San Gimignano. *ArsKey Magazine*, 20 March 2009. Available from http://www.teknemedia.net/magazine_detail.html?mId=6597 [Accessed 24.03.2015].

partially perfect reproduction of the human body and the use of coloured wax to recreate the tactile quality and translucency of human skin, also indicates her interest in the body as a specimen. Similar to Benedetto da Maiano, De Bruyckere is a sculptor-painter and uses her knowledge of painting acquired through studying old masters, to instil a sense of tenderness and humanity in the skin of the man in 'Per Benedetto'. Nonetheless, the cold bluish tint and the discolouration of the skin, is a sign of a chemical reaction within the body that occurs after death, and points to its frailty and vulnerability.

Per Benedetto (2009) (image 6-11), being placed in dialogue with the wooden Christ on the cross carved by Benedetto da Maiano, may also point to Christ's death for the salvation of humanity and the seeming injustice of this death, offering itself as a reflection on the universal theme of human suffering. The image of Christ, the Son of God, is essential for Christian believers, as he represents salvation in a tangible form. However, the crucifixion of Christ also carries the narrative of unjust punishment, as the innocent Christ died on the cross to save humanity. "For Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, so that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit", (Peter 3:18).



6-13: Berlinde De Bruyckere, *Per Benedetto*, 2009, wax, wood, iron, epoxy

The connection to suffering in this sculpture, is strengthened by positioning the painfully contorted body high on top of a cupboard directly on the hard wood, denying him the protection and delicate support of soft pillows or blankets provided to the body in image (6-7). There is more to the choice of wardrobe-plinth in terms of elevating the work aesthetically and from the view of the spectator, as well as symbolically bringing it closer to God. In fact, the old cupboard does not only function as a physical support, but by placing the emaciated and suffering body directly underneath the gaze of the virgin Mary (image 6-13), the viewer is reminded of the mother's suffering for the death of her son in the 'Pietà'.

6.3.2 The Crucifixion

In *Jelle Luipaard* (2004-2005), (image 6-14) De Bruyckere references the ultimate icon of Christian religion; the crucified Christ.³⁰



6-14: **Berlinde De Bruyckere**, *Jelle Luipaard*, 2004-2005, wax, iron, epoxy and wood, 174 x 36 x 64 cm

³⁰ During the fifth century Christ on the Cross (Christus triumphans) was depicted winning over death, alive, holding his head high and with opened eyes. This type of representation, which was also found in pagan iconography, made Christ's body into a social body (Leib), a king. At a later stage, during the Byzantine times, Christ was depicted as dying (Christus patiens), in agony with closed eyes. Christ's body, which now symbolises the individual and physical body (Körper), is represented in pain. The body of Christ (De imitation Christi) was set as example of the body that must suffer to redeem its sins and gain a place in paradise, (Verdi, L. 2012: 105-106). In suffering the Christian believer finds redemption.

The body of *Jelle Luipaard* alludes to the crucified body of Christ through form and position; the Christian connection is immediately evident, however, what may attract the attention of viewers, are the striking differences. As has been discussed in chapter three, De Bruyckere refers to the real human body through form, indexicality, materials and size but what disturbs the viewer's gaze is the disruption and deformation of what is so well known: the human body. De Bruyckere uses the same strategy when referencing Christian imagery and narratives. Alexandrova, for instance, highlights how work such as *Jelle Luipaard* (2004 - 2005), which invokes past artworks and religious iconography, introduces important visual elements that distance it from the religious narrative, thus causing it to become simultaneously familiar and unfamiliar, (Alexandrova, A. 2008: 775). The incompleteness of *Jelle Luipaard*'s body and the missing head, contribute to the distance between this sculpture and the representation of Christ's body on the cross.



6.15: **Berlinde De Bruyckere**, *Jelle Luipaard*, 2004-2005, wax, wood, iron, epoxy

In *Jelle Luipaard* (2004-2005), the way the body pieces are joined together points to the non-functionality of the body, a body that notably differs from the real one. The artist consciously

chose to distance the representation of the body from the Greek ideal of beauty and strength. Instead, she selected an androgynous looking body. Behind this choice, lies the artist's need to represent "a fragile and introverted man" in order to convey her views on humanity, (De Bruyckere, B. 2006).

In De Bruyckere's artworks, which may remind spectators of the crucifixion (images, 6-14; 6-15), the cross itself, the symbol of Christ suffering, is missing.³¹ Instead, the artist employs poles (images 6-16), and a giant hook, (image 6-15), which, although visually reminiscent of the cross, forms a sustaining armature, like the bone structure of the emptied body. The hook-cross, which takes on the role of the skeleton, and the body belong together and it may not be possible to imagine them as separate entities.

6.3.3 The Man of Sorrows

De Bruyckere revisited and found inspiration in the theme of the crucifixion in 2006, for a series of works titled *Schmerzmann* (2006) or *Man of Sorrows*. The series consists of five figures painfully hanging on an iron pole. De Bruyckere conceived these figures as independent entities:

... each figure resting on its own post. To each his own fate: one hang stoically, like an empty skin over his cast-iron column; another clasps his post with all the strength left in him ... I will give each sculpture a different character, pointing to the different ways in which they undergo their fate, (De Bruyckere, B. 2006).

The title *Schmerzmann* has been translated as the *Man of Sorrows* and signifies both Christ's pity for human beings and their pity for Christ's suffering in order to free humanity of their sins (Schiller, G.1972: 197). This series, also refers to a late medieval painting by Lucas Cranach the Elder, in which Christ is portrayed as a plagued and suffering man wearing a crown of thorns, which awakens the viewers' pity. Depicted frontally with the head slightly tilted to the right and his arm crossed over his body, the painting gives visual prominence to

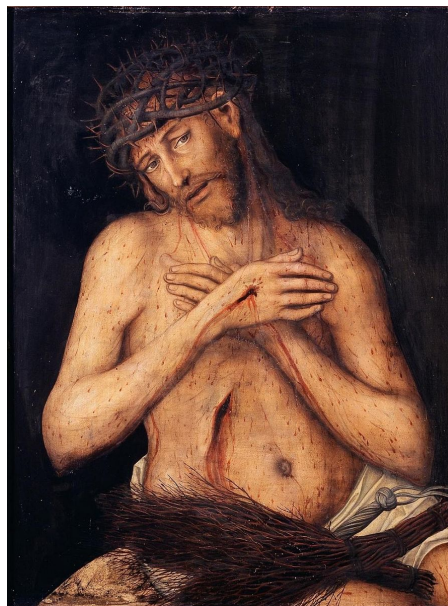
³¹ Christian dogma is the origin of two types of iconography, where the cross assumes a double meaning. It can signify the great victory over sin and death but also the tragic spectacle of suffering. In fact, the cross is one of the instruments that symbolises Christ's suffering, the 'Arma Christi'. 'Arma Christi' stands in for Christ's suffering on earth and are often represented by the instruments that have inflicted the pain: The cross, lance, crown of thorns, scourge and rod, (Schiller G. 1972: 184). In order to understand the concept of the suffering body that can be both weak and powerful at the same time, and the meaning that figurative art has given to the body that lives, dies and resurrects, it is necessary to return to the concept of Corpus Mysticum Christi, (Verdi, L. 2012. 104).

Christ's wounds. The wounds, the marks of death, also function as proof of the risen Christ (Schiller, G. 1972: 185).



6-16: **Berlinde De Bruyckere**. *Schmerzensmann IV*, 2006
epoxy, wax and iron, 415 x 102 x 98 cm

The Man of Sorrows as a devotional image, does not illustrate a story but presents Christ's suffering as an entity independent from time and space. In fact, to communicate Christ's eternal suffering, Cranach has painted Christ's image on a neutral background, which separates him from a temporal and spatial context. For Gertrud Schiller, Christ in the Man of Sorrows, through his "eternal suffering", inhabits contemporaneously life and death, as he is "dead as a man, but alive as a God" (Schiller, G. 1972: 198).



6-17: **Lucas Cranach d.Ä.** (or workshop), *Ecce Homo / Christus als Schmerzensmann*,
Circa 1515, (Kunstsammlungen Böttcherstraße, Bremen)

The series of work, *Schmerzmann* (2006), through their connection to the ‘Man of Sorrows’, can be interpreted as an investigation on the visual representation of suffering (Wieg, C. 2011: 1).³² The connection to the cross and Christ’s crucifixion may awaken feelings of guilt in the spectator. In fact, similar to the believers who realise the connection between Christ’s suffering and their own sins, the spectators may question their role in the suffering of the figure hanging from the pole. Christ’s predicament, beyond its religious content, also becomes a metaphor for the human condition. A condition deeply affected by the paradox having to come to terms with the inevitability of their mortality and at the same time, maintain the hope of overcoming this inevitability through their faith. Indeed, Christ’s sacrifice in order to redeem humanity, along with his resurrection, not only invests suffering with meaning and the potential of reaching a higher level of spirituality, but also appeals to our desire for immortality.

Unlike the body of Christ on the cross, the figures hanging on the poles have been emptied before being suspended and exposed to the public. Deprived of their vital organs and sustaining skeleton, *Schmerzmann* (2006) is reminiscent of the horrible bodily torture. De Bruyckere’s figures may then represent man being punished for his sins or being punished even though he is innocent. Guilty or victim, each figure, each on its pole, cross or even gently placed upon a cupboard or table, is isolated, lonely and left to their own devices to cope with their pain and suffering.

The bodies, suspended on the poles in *Schmerzmann* (2006) (images 6-18; 6-19), become abstract empty shells, and their hanging position may awaken contrasting feelings in the spectator. The bodies dangle like clothes on pegs after having been worn. The empty skin embodies the essence of the people who have worn them, retaining some of the character of those who inhabited them. The figures, deprived of the inner organs and exposed like slaughtered animals, can also be seen as carcasses displayed in the window of a butcher’s shop, reconnecting the skin to the missing flesh and the flesh of animals.

These empty bodies, lacking the support of their bones, rely completely on the iron poles for support. The theme of dependency, as discussed in the *Pietà* images (6-1 and 6-4), is recurrent in De Bruyckere’s oeuvre.

³² De Bruyckere, B. and Wieg, C. (2011). The Mystery of the Body: Berlinde De Bruyckere in Dialogue with Lucas Cranach and Pier Paolo Pasolini. *Kunst Museum Bern. Exhibition Guide*, 21.10. 2011 - 12. 02. 2012. Available from http://www.kunstmuseumbern.ch/admin/data/hosts/kmb/files/page_editorial_paragraph_file/file_en/14/Ausstellungsfuhrer_Berlinde_De_Bruyckere_e.pdf?lm=1321628807 [Accessed 20.03.2015].



6-18: **Berlinde De Bruyckere**, *Schmerzemann V*, 2006,
epoxy, wax, iron, 420 x 80 x 80 cm

The pole/cross and the body form a continuum, an indivisible entity, where the support and the figure protect one another: the pole forming an armature and sustaining the figure, and the body curling around the pole. This dependence may be interpreted as the need for each other and the need of the support of other people, but could also imply the suffering that human beings inflict upon each other. Moreover, De Bruyckere draws attention to the fact that the poles become “a surrogate skeleton”, substantially differing from the traditional role of the plinths or columns, which were used to highlight the greatness of the men represented (De Bruyckere, B. 2006).

As De Bruyckere points out, her aim is not to re-tell a well-known story but to “present an image of man that enables the spectator to identify with it...in spite of their relatively abstract appearance” (De Bruyckere, B. 2006).



6-19: Berlinde De Bruyckere, *Schmerzmann*, 2006, installation view, Hauser & Wirth London, Piccadilly

Although De Bruyckere points out several times that her figures in *Schmerzmann* (2006) “function without a story. They represent a singular vision” (De Bruyckere, B. 2006), the title and visual reference to the crucifixion and the painting of Lucas Cranach, imbues the work with past narratives. We may agree that “the absence of body parts does not need to be compensated for by a narrative or an anecdote” (De Bruyckere, B. 2006), however, as soon as an artwork connects different instants in history or different concepts, viewers may be tempted to develop a narrative connecting those ‘themes’. In fact, Deleuze states that even if an artwork “has nothing to narrate and no story to tell, something is happening all the same” (Deleuze, G. 2014: 9). All the figures in the series *Schmerzmann* (2006) are artworks created in the twenty-first century and exhibited in a gallery space. However, at the same time these fragments of bodies carry with them images that belong to different moments in time; the crucifixion, the passion of Christ and his suffering, but also other images of suffering expressed through other media, such as literature, theatre and mass media.

6.3.4 The Dialogue with Tradition

In 2011, De Bruyckere prepared a travelling exhibition entitled: ‘Into One Another. Berlinde the Bruyckere in Dialogue with Cranach and Pasolini’. The exhibition is presented as a dialogue between the works of Lucas Cranach (1472-1553), the films of Pasolini (1922-1975),

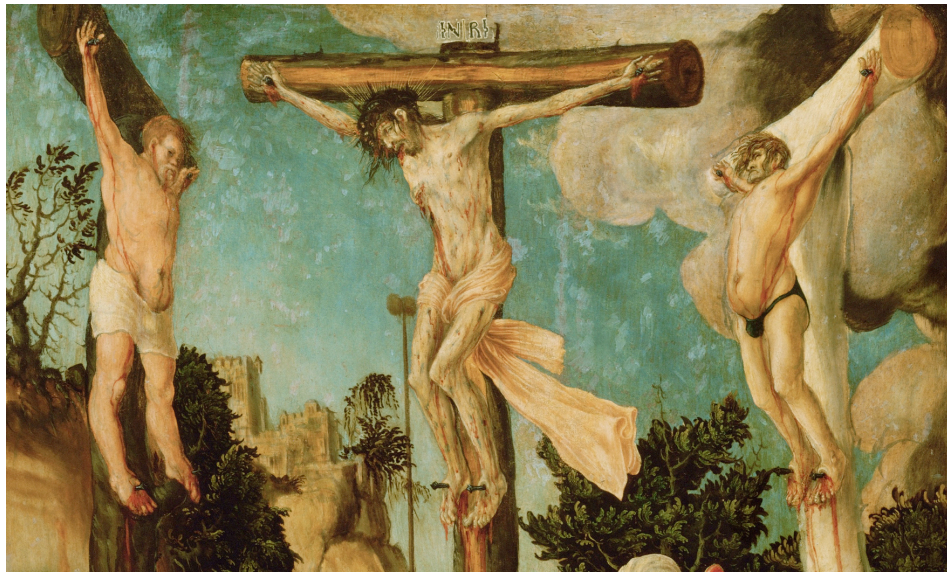
and her own artworks. In the show, which travelled to the Kunstmuseum Moritzburg and Kunstmuseum Bern in Switzerland in the same year, she juxtaposed artwork created by artists in different countries and using different media in a dialogue spanning several epochs. De Bruyckere's artwork was shown alongside several paintings by Lucas Cranach and screenings of Pasolini's *Il Vangelo secondo Matteo* (1964), and *Teorema* (1968), to instigate new configurations, connections and patterns when viewed together.³³ This mixing of time, through referencing across historical periods and juxtaposing artworks created by different artists, provides a context in which both differences and similarities play a vital role in the formation of meaning.

Already, the title of the exhibition informs the viewer that the work is to be seen in relation to the work of Lucas Cranach the Elder and the Italian filmmaker Pasolini. Cornelia Wieg draws attention to the fact that the German title of this exhibition 'Mysterium Leib', Berlinde De Bruyckere im Dialog mit Cranach und P.P.P.', may assume a slightly different connotation, as it contains the word 'mysterium', which is reminiscent of 'Mysterium Fedei' and 'Leib', which means body (Wieg, C. 2011: 192). The word mystery, in Christian teaching, takes on the role of truth about God. The truth is only known because God has revealed it through the creation, the scriptures and Jesus Christ. The German word 'Leib' used to mean life. Comparing the word 'lichaam' (body), which the Belgian artist uses to talk about the body, with the etymology of the similar sounding German word 'Leichnam', Wieg points out that the word 'Leichnam' could be interpreted as "a cover or receptacle of life" (Wieg, C. 2011: 192).

³³These paintings of Luca Cranach were exhibited alongside De Bruyckere's artwork and Pasolini's films at the Kunstmuseum Bern between 21.10.2011 and 12.02.2012.

Lucas Cranach d. Ä. (1472 - 1552), *Die Versuchung des heiligen Antonius*, 1506, Holzschnitt, 40,1 x 27,5 cm. Kunstmuseum Bern, Schenkung Berchtold Haller. Lucas Cranach d. Ä. (1472 - 1552), *Die Busse des Hl. Chrysostomus*, Kupferstich, 24,9 x 18,4 cm, Kunstmuseum Bern, Staat Bern, Legat Joh. Rudolf Koch, Lucas Cranach d. Ä. (1472 - 1552), *Die Busse des heiligen Hieronymus*, 1509 Holzschnitt, 33,8 x 24 cm, Kunstmuseum Bern, Staat Bern, Legat Joh. Rudolf Koch, Lucas Cranach d. Ä. (1472 - 1552), *Der Sündenfall*, 1509, Holzschnitt, 33,7 x 24 cm, Kunstmuseum Bern, Schenkung Berchtold Haller. Lucas Cranach d. Ä. (1472 - 1552), *VI: Die Geisselung*, Holzschnitt, 25,6 x 17,2 cm, Kunstmuseum Bern, Schenkung Berchtold Haller. Lucas Cranach d. Ä. (1472 - 1552) *VII: Die Dornenkrönung*, 1509, Holzschnitt, 25,1 x 17,3 cm, Kunstmuseum Bern, Schenkung Berchtold Haller. Lucas Cranach d. Ä. (1472 - 1552), *XI: Kreuzigung*, 1509, Holzschnitt, 25 x 17,3 cm. Kunstmuseum Bern, Schenkung Berchtold Haller, Lucas Cranach d. Ä. (1472 - 1552) *XIII: Die Grablegung*, 1509, Holzschnitt, 25,1 x 17,2 cm. Kunstmuseum Bern, Schenkung Berchtold Haller, Lucas Cranach d. Ä. (1472 - 1552) *XIV: Die Auferstehung*, 1509, Holzschnitt, 25,0 x 17,2 cm, Kunstmuseum Bern, Schenkung Berchtold Haller. Lucas Cranach d. Ä. (1472 - 1552) *Schmerzmann / The Man of Sorrows*, 1515/35, Rotbuchenholz / red beech wood, 56,9 x 39,6 cm, Evangelische Kirchgemeinde Wörlitz.

For a complete list of the works exhibited alongside De Bruyckere's artwork at the Kunstmuseum Bern between 21.10.2011 and 12.02.2012 see: De Bruyckere, b. and Wieg, C. (2011). *The Mystery of the Body: Berlinde De Bruyckere in Dialogue with Lucas Cranach and Pier Paolo Pasolini. Kunst Museum Bern. Exhibition Guide*, 21.10.2011-12.02.2012. Available from http://www.kunstmuseumbern.ch/admin/data/hosts/kmb/files/page_editorial_paragraph_file/file_en/10/111019_Works_De_Bruyckere_d.pdf?lm=1321628494 [Accessed 23.04.2015].



6-20: Detail of **Lucas Cranach**, *Kreuzigung Christi*, circa 1501

De Bruyckere references Christian iconography, late medieval and Renaissance paintings narrating Christ's passion, in order to represent suffering and communicate her views on humanity. The artist is particularly fascinated by some of Lucas Cranach's paintings and his approach towards the body, in particular the way he distorts the body to visually convey psychic pain. The body then becomes a tool with which to evoke a 'mental state' (Theys, H. 2011: 21, 22). As De Bruyckere states in an interview:

Cranach has fascinated me for a long time because of his formal language and his approach towards the body: his elongated figures, strange proportions, the black background that releases the figures from their dependency on the context—all these aspects have influenced my way of thinking. His subjects were morbid and cruel but there has been always the ambivalence and ambiguity between how the form fits into the subject: there is the death but no blood; there is a sword that kills, but at the same time, the gentle touch of the victim. In a similar way, I feel a strong connection with the stress on the body and its sophisticated, visual language.³⁴

The similarity between Lucas Cranach the Elder and De Bruyckere, however, is not limited to the aesthetic representation of the body but also extends to the subject matter. As Bruyckere acknowledges:

If I had to sum up what it is that strikes me most about Cranach, I would say his subject matter; all those essential questions which I deal with in my work, too and which have been asked countless times and are answered and not answered and asked again" (De Bruyckere, B. in Theys, H. 2011: 22).

³⁴ Gnyp, M. (2010). Berlinde De Bruyckere. *Zoo Magazine*, 29, September. Available from <http://www.martagnyp.com/interviews/berlindedebuyckere> [Accessed 19.03.2015].

Presenting the wax sculptures in a museum or gallery alongside ‘old’ paintings, not only projects meaning onto the skin of De Bruyckere’s artwork, but also extends to the physical space occupied by these objects. De Bruyckere’s *Schmerzensmann* (2006), combined with Cranach’s homonymous paintings, or *Per Benedetto* (2009), exhibited alongside a crucifix, becomes an installation and can be seen as a contained ‘world’ in which the viewer may feel trapped.

However, De Bruyckere’s bodies, as in *Schmerzensmann V* (2006), (image 6-18), are often presented with an opening; an opening that passes through the wounds in the represented bodies, through which the viewer is allowed to look directly into the flesh.³⁵ For Deleuze, “the whole figure passes through a hole or a point ... where the body attempts to escape from itself” (Deleuze, G. 2014: 24). The wound, therefore, represents the only escape route. As De Bruyckere confirms, “if I show you today the wounds of the body ... you are invited to look into that hole and at the same time to contemplate the feeling of emptiness”.³⁶

The wound in Cranach’s *Man of Sorrows*, (image 6-17) is the visible sign of Christ’s suffering. The wound may provoke anxiety and disgust, as well as sorrow and empathy in the spectators. The traumatised and wounded body in *Schmerzensmann V* (2006), going through the ordeal of the crucifixion, becomes the symbol of suffering and a prerequisite for self-awareness, empathy and compassion. Jill Bennett explains that the wounded body of Christ played an essential role in engaging the attention of the believer in the middle ages, (Bennett, J. 2001: 10). Through the ages, the powerful metaphor of the body of Christ has often been used for religious and non-religious purposes to indicate human suffering, in the hope of instilling compassion and healing in its viewers. The propensity to represent the human body as suffering and ugly originates in Christian iconography. In fact, Simone Korff Sausse argues that:

...ugliness is associated with the idea of suffering, which can be seen in contemporary art and particularly in body art. With the principle of incarnation, suffering is the lot both of the divine being and of humans. Ugliness is no longer that which comes and disturbs the order of the world and the ideal of beauty, ..., but depicts on the contrary that which is specifically human (Korff Sausse, S. 2015: 47).

³⁵ For a more detailed discussion on the concept of the wound to communicate physical and psychic suffering see chapter seven.

³⁶ Bühler, K. (2011). Interview with Berlinde De Bruyckere: *Mysterium Leib*. Berlinde De Bruyckere im Dialog mit Lucas Cranach und Pier Paolo Pasolini. *Kunst Museum Bern*, 17 October 2011. Available from http://www.kunstmuseumbern.ch/admin/data/hosts/kmb/files/page_editorial_paragraph_file/file_en/12/111019_Interview_De_Bruyckere.pdf?lm=1321628636 [Accessed 01.05.2015].

The fragmented and wounded bodies in De Bruyckere's sculptures, are imbued with two thousand years of 'Christianity and art history', and make reference to Christ's physical suffering during his 'Passion', as well as the repetition and representation of this suffering in religious art. In De Bruyckere's figures, the wound referencing the suffering of Christ provides a spiritual connection to the largely secular spectators, encouraging them to acknowledge the vulnerability and materiality of the human body in order to highlight the sorrow humanity is made to suffer. Suffering in this case can be seen as both existential, due to human fragility and mortality, as well as inflicted by fellow human beings.

Similar to the figures in the painting by Lucas Cranach (images 6-17 and 6-20), De Bruyckere's sculptures present a suffering and scourged figure, mutilated and not in control of the body, in order to awaken empathy and guilt in the spectator. Through a layered system of references she connects past and present in a 'time continuum', in order to point out that time and the motive of violence may change, but the suffering always remains the same. With this, she seems to question both past and contemporary society in which human beings have to suffer at the hands of other human beings. In this respect, De Bruyckere bears a resemblance to the Italian filmmaker Pier Paolo Pasolini, who did not tolerate the indifference towards the suffering of others. In fact, in a poem entitled Italy, he heavily criticised Italian people for their passivity and indifference towards the suffering and death of others.³⁷

6.3.5 Present Perfect: Pier Paolo Pasolini

Berlinde De Bruyckere, Lucas Cranach and Pier Paolo Pasolini, share a particular way of expressing existential questions through the representation of the human body (Wieg, C. 2011: 193). As De Bruyckere stated in an interview: "the works of Cranach and Pasolini are dealing with the same subjects as I do".³⁸

The fascination with Christian iconography sparked De Bruyckere's interest for the work of Pier Paolo Pasolini (Wieg, C. 2011: 193). For the 2011-2012 travelling exhibition, 'The Mystery of the Body: Berlinde De Bruyckere in Dialogue with Lucas Cranach and P.P.P.', the artist created a series of works entitled 'Into-One-Another To P.P.P' (2010-2011), inspired by

³⁷ "A vedere morire nel modo più atroce / gli altri, nella più strana indifferenza. / Io muoio, ed anche questo mi nuoce", (seeing people die in the most atrocious way/ and seeing the strange indifference in the others/ I die, and that hurts too.) Available from: http://www.isoladellapoesia.com/poesie_famose/109-poesia-sugli-italiani-di-pasolini.php [Accessed 23.04.2015].

³⁸ Bühler, K. (2011). Interview with Berlinde De Bruyckere: Mysterium Leib. Berlinde De Bruyckere im Dialog mit Lucas Cranach und Pier Paolo Pasolini. *Kunstmuseum Bern*, 17 October 2011. Available from http://www.kunstmuseumbern.ch/admin/data/hosts/kmb/files/page_editorial_paragraph_file/file_en/12/111019_Interview_De_Bruyckere.pdf?lm=1321628636 [Accessed 20.03.2015].

films of the Italian director. During the whole exhibition, an entire room was dedicated to the screening of, *Il Vangelo Secondo Matteo* (1964), and *Teorema* (1968).³⁹ Although De Bruyckere had seen Pasolini's films in her youth, she only became aware of the similarities between his films and her own work at a later stage. As De Bruyckere reports:

After having seen 'Il Vangelo Secondo Matteo', I realised I was very close to his work and I want to spit out what this is all about. I wanted to show people what it's about in way so that they can understand it. Because the language that we use, is the language of beauty. It's not to block people. You recognise yourself when you are watching the movies as you can recognise yourself, when you are watching my work. The language starts from your thoughts, difficulties and questions and tries to give answers by making the work" (Bühler, K. 2011).⁴⁰

Pier Paolo Pasolini, writer, poet and filmmaker, was an atheist intensely influenced by his religious upbringing, and a Marxist barred from the Italian communist party (Di Blasi, L. 2012: 7). Known and often described as a man of many contradictions, he was particularly skilled in pointing out these incongruities and transforming them into aesthetically and politically powerful tools (Di Blasi, L. 2012: 10). In the 'Gospel According to St. Matthew', opposites coexist in the figure of Christ but they become unified through the identification of Pasolini with Christ. A synthesis seems to occur, not only at an aesthetic level but also at an existential one. The Christ in the film, alongside his enduring ultimate sacrifice to redeem humanity, fulfils the aspirations of the poet to speak truthfully and unite ethics, aesthetics, and life (Calanca, M. & Montesanto, G. 1999).

This attentiveness to contradictions also indicates Pasolini's preference for everything that could disrupt the standardisation and homogenisation promoted by a consumerist society. In highlighting the absurdities inherent in society's conventions, Pasolini attempted to turn spectators into "critical witnesses, fully conscious, if not in fact participating" and spreading the seeds of change (Grieco, A. in Mazzini, S. 2012: 87). As De Bruyckere observes, "reading in the bible is like watching Pasolini. It urges you to start thinking and to add something personal, make reference to your own situation and thoughts" (Berlinde De Bruyckere in Bühler, K. 2012).

³⁹ To see the floor plan of the exhibition, go to: Kunstmuseum Bern (2011-2012). 'The Mystery of the Body: In Dialogue with Lucas Cranach and Pier Paolo Pasolini'. *Exhibition Guide*. Available from http://www.kunstmuseumbern.ch/admin/data/hosts/kmb/files/page_editorial_paragraph_file/file_en/14/Ausstellungsfuhrer_Berlinde_De_Bruyckere_e.pdf?lm=1321628807 [Accessed 20.03.2015].

⁴⁰ *ibid* [Accessed 07.04.2015].

Pasolini's *Il Vangelo Secondo Matteo* (1964), is a faithful reproduction of the Gospel according to Matthew, retracing the stages of Jesus' life from his birth to crucifixion, death and resurrection. In his film, Pasolini emphasises the humanity of Christ rather than his divine side. He considers the version of the Apostle Matthew as the one in which Christ's humanity stands out, in which Christ is a man among men.⁴¹ Christ, in the *Gospel According to St. Matthew*, although gentle and humble, reacts strongly and angrily to hypocrisy and falsehood. Pasolini skillfully highlights the powerful and subversive messages contained in the original Gospel, and presents a Christ that does not tolerate indifference towards the suffering of others (Mazzini, S. 2012: 145). Some critics, such as Peter Bondalella, go as far as comparing Pasolini's Jesus to a Marxist, "a man who has come to bring not peace but the sword" (Bondella, P. 2009: 235).

It is this denunciation of the indifference towards the suffering of others that Pasolini and De Bruyckere seem to especially appreciate in this gospel. Both artists highlight the indifference and the lack of responsibility for what happens to others. We may feel pity for them but we have grown insensitive to their plight.



6-21: **Berlinde De Bruyckere:** *Into One-Another II To P.P.P.*, 2010, wax, epoxy, iron, wood, glass, 193 x 183 x 86 cm

⁴¹ "In parole molto semplici e povere: io non credo che Cristo sia figlio di Dio, perché non sono credente, almeno nella coscienza. Ma credo che Cristo sia divino: credo cioè che in lui l'umanità sia così alta, rigorosa e ideale da andare al di là dei comuni termini dell'umanità. Per questo dico "poesia": strumento per esprimere questo mio sentimento irrazionale per Cristo..." (I don't believe that Christ is God's son, because I'm not a believer. However, I believe in his divinity, I believe that Christ takes humanity beyond itself and represents what is best in human beings. Christ represents humanity in its most ideal form. For this reason, I use poetry to convey my irrational feelings for him.) (Pasolini, P.P in Calanca, M & Montesanto, G. (1999). *Il Vangelo secondo Matteo*. *CinemAvvenire*. Available from <http://www.cinemavvenire.it/seminari/seminario-1999-lettura-del-film-il-vangelo-secondo-matteo/il-vangelo-secondo-matteo> [Accessed 24.04.2015]).

De Bruyckere's *Into One-Another II To P.P.P* (image 6-21), features a human-like figure made using a combination of different casts to form a disfigured and emaciated body. The remains of these human beings enshrined in a glass box, may be reminiscent of a reliquary containing the relicts of a saint. However, the positioning of the body points to a different reality; the figure seems captured in its attempt to rise from the floor. Unlike the actor in Pasolini's *Vangelo* (1964), (image 6-22), who pushes himself up and walks away, the figure in De Bruyckere's sculpture, appears to be stuck in a vulnerable and exposed position, unable to lift itself up. The missing arms accentuate the predicament in which this being is trapped, indicating the impossibility of getting out of a situation without outside help. This is help that may never reach him as the figure is isolated and contained in a glass vitrine. As discussed in detail in chapter three, presenting the sculptures inside a glass box may not only imply the vulnerability and frailty of the body, but may also point to its isolation.



6-22: Pier Paolo Pasolini, 1964, *Il Vangelo secondo Matteo* (1964)

Similarly, Pasolini, in the sequence of the prayer of Jesus, and in the sequences of the ascent to Calvary and the crucifixion of 'Il Vangelo Secondo Matteo' (1964), shows the anguish and loneliness of suffering and death through the physical pain of Christ, the shame of the nakedness of his body, and the silent agony of Mary. The emphasis on these feelings of isolation and loneliness in both artists' works seems an implicit appeal to foster a shared language with which to communicate human existential and physical pain.

Il Vangelo Secondo Matteo (1964), is a faithful reproduction of the Gospel, but it is also an attempt by Pasolini to harmonise two contradicting points of view: the primitive, irrational and instinctive body, with the educated, rational, refined and intellectual being (Calanca, M. & Montesanto, G. 1999). At the beginning of the movie, the body assumes the main role as the

story and emotions are conveyed through the bodies and facial expressions of Mary and Joseph. When the camera lingers on the faces of the actors or on Christ's body, the spectator experiences an interruption of the action and the body may be perceived as a portal, a boundary through which the viewer is invited to pass (Grieco, A. in Mazzini, S. 2012: 95).

Both Pasolini and De Bruyckere, are aware of and interested in the physical materiality of the body. For Wieg, for example, this explains how the image of the crucifixion in De Bruyckere's work can be interpreted as "a physiological phenomenon" (Wieg, C. 2011: 192). Flesh in her sculptures, however, may then take on both a spiritual and a phenomenological meaning; connecting the sensory and bodily understanding with what can only be imagined.

For Pasolini too, resistance to the constraining boundaries set by modern society, takes place in the flesh (Maggi, A. 2009:106). The body and its physical existence is of critical importance in Pasolini's films and writings, as a way of reconnecting to the pre-linguistic reality, as well as a means of overcoming the restrictions imposed by a bourgeois society (Wieg, C. 2011: 193). However, while Pasolini used religious narratives to question and criticise the society he lived in, De Bruyckere's fragmented figures inhabit a place where different temporalities amalgamate to extend time and form a 'time continuum'.

For Agnese Grieco, it is the body of the actor and the way Pasolini employs it that "becomes a door opening towards a deeper reality", and may better represent the director's passion for reality. The actor's body becomes an "open stage", through which the actor expresses "the anthropological self", the self that exists before and beyond the role played in the film.⁴² The function of the actor then surpasses the character played and brings into the film "a linguistic fragment of reality". This converging of reality, through the body of the actor and his acting, creates a multi-layered reality (Grieco, A. in Blasi, D. 2012: 88-95). In fact, Pasolini and De Bruyckere share a passion for beauty and an interest in representing reality in a complex and multi-layered way. As she explains:

He [Pasolini] is able to make a real angel from his actress. But to achieve this effect, he will endlessly repeat each scene and will be involved in setting up the image right to the tiniest of details. I see similarities in my approach. I let my models undergo a metamorphosis by disclosing to them my ideas about the final image and its emotional connotations, so they can dig into themselves and search for these particular emotions".⁴³

⁴² Ninetto Davoli is often quoted as example, in which alongside his acting the actor subjective, anthropological, socio- and geo-political reality would emerge, (Grieco, A. in Di Blasi, D. 2012: 98-100).

⁴³ Gnyp, M. (2010). Berlinde De Bruyckere. *Zoo Magazine*, 29. September 2010. Available from <http://www.martagnyp.com/interviews/berlindedebuyckere> [Accessed 24.03.2015].

Another significant correlation between Pasolini and De Bruyckere lies in their respective positions regarding the history of art and in recognising the tradition in which they live and work. In fact, both artists are knowledgeable in art history, share the love for Old Masters, and consider their work “old fashioned” (Wieg, C. 2011: 197; Gnyp, M. 2010). Pasolini, for instance, explains:

What I have in my head as a visual field, are the frescoes of Mosaccio, of Giotto – who are the painters I love the most ... And I am unable to conceive images, landscapes, compositions outside of this initial fourteenth- century pictorial passion of mine, in which man stands at the centre of every perspective (Pasolini, P.P in Siciliano, E. 1982: 232).

Pasolini admired the past and combined his deep knowledge of ancient mythology and the New Testament with his passion for the classics and Italian literature. His work united European literature, Renaissance paintings, Catholic ritual, and the political events of his era to form a very personal language.⁴⁴

He was a surprisingly modern figure, moving between and beyond different traditions, identities and positions, as well as a radical critic of contemporary capitalism and consumerism, constantly striving to find a sacred reality within or beyond a homogenised Western world, (Di Blasi, L. Gragnolati, M. and Holzhey, F.E. 2012: 7).⁴⁵

In a similar way, De Bruyckere combines themes and iconography recurrent in Christian iconography, old masters, and contemporary artists in order to create her own personal language with which to address, what she considers, the ever recurring themes of; loneliness, mortality, vulnerability, suffering, and desire. Religious iconography does play a central role, however, as the artist explains:

... I translate it into my own language and make it contemporary. It's true that suffering is important to my work. Maybe ... suffering and religion, serve as an entry into my work so people can feel and question themselves. This is just one layer. I grew up with all these references. They are not something that I use. They are just there. All the other layers come from daily lives, my re-search into literature, discovering Pasolini, and so on (Berlinde De Bruyckere in Zhao, S. 2013).

⁴⁴ For example, in Pasolini's *Mamma Roma* (1962) the scene of Ettore's death, where the young man dies tied to his prison's bed is clearly a reference to Mantegna's 'Il Cristo Morto' –The Dead Christ (1475-1478).

⁴⁵ Manuele Gragnolati sustains that, Pasolini transforms the Greek and Judeo Christian figures into unstable and unsettling characters, which become 'multistable' through continuously shifting between “West and East, North and South, the present and the past, rationality and myth, identity and otherness”, (Gragnolati, M. in Di Blasi, L. 2012: 9).

De Bruyckere takes advantage of the spectators' emotional investment when viewing images referencing Christian iconography, old masters and other contemporary visual artists. This cognitive process, which recent neurological studies named 'alternative neural networks model', is linked to the visual analogy that reminds viewers of well-known prevailing images or histories in their culture. In this case, the notion of suffering is mediated through a metaphor. Empathy, therefore, is evoked through a complex convergence of knowledge, cultural and visual clues (Schott, G.D. 2015: 812-813).

She specifically chose *Teorema* and *Il Vangelo Secondo Matteo* for their connection to Christianity, and for their search into the contribution of the Christian narrative surrounding 'the mystery of life'.

It's the films where religion also becomes so important and the question how you deal with human life, the mystery of life. 'Teorema' is all about seducing and how you can be destroyed by desire. Those two topics are so human and it's also mystical how Pasolini deals with it. ... I wanted to find a relation between him and me and therefore, I needed to reduce the subjects to three motifs or feelings that are mirrored in all of my Pasolini works (De Bruyckere, B. 2011 in Bühler, K.).

Into One Another I to P.P.P., (image 6-23), at first sight could be described as two horribly mutilated bodies. The body underneath is reduced to a torso. However, one could also interpret the sculpture as the representation of the same body at different times. Indeed, the different stages of fragmentation inherent in the same sculpture may indicate that the represented body has been captured during a process of transformation or metamorphoses. Though many parts of the bodies are missing and others tend to be abstract, some sections are uncannily human. The feet, toes and details of the veins on the legs in *Into One-Another I To P.P.P.* (2010-2011), are reproduced almost to perfection to include the smallest wrinkle of the skin. This cohabiting of hyperrealism and abstraction in the same body may create confusion in the spectator, drawing attention to the different stages of fragmentation simultaneously present in De Bruyckere sculptures.⁴⁶

⁴⁶ For a discussion of the co-existence of 'realism' and abstraction within the representation of the same body see chapters three and five.



6-23: Berlinde De Bruyckere, *Into One Another I to P.P.P.*, 2010 – 2011

The juxtaposition of the missing head and the precisely reproduced body parts alongside distorted and morphologically inaccurate ones invests the sculpture with a sense of being unfinished, thus emphasising the process of transformation at work in the figure. The sculpture, although displayed inside a glass box, which reinforces the sense of vulnerability and frailty of the body, does not constrain the figure to immobility. The body, though in isolation, still remains in a transformative or metamorphic state. The spectator, confronted with these sculptures, (image 6-23), is asked to engage with the artwork and choose between contrasting alternatives. One, which points to death and decay and the other, which indicates the possibility of change through transformation.

The characters in Pasolini's 'Teorema' (1968), after meeting the guest, are also confronted with conflicts and transformation. The guest, a handsome, gentle and reserved man endowed with an incredible sensual energy, visits a bourgeois family constituted of the father⁴⁷; the mother, Lucia; the son, Pietro; the daughter, Odetta; and finally; the maid, Emilia, a peasant girl. With his arrival, the guest disrupts the everyday activities of the family members. Each member, including the maid, desires to and unites his/her body with that of this beautiful and fascinating guest. The family members have little knowledge about the guest who triggers these desires and expectations in them, but always remains inaccessible to them. The guest mirrors the role played by the psychoanalyst; he hardly talks and is removed from every-day life, as Peppel explains "he triggers projections, desires, and, ultimately, existential crises" (Peppel, C. in Di Blasi, L. 2012: 12, 109). The guest leaves as unexpectedly and mysteriously as he arrived and, as he predicts in his reading from Rimbaud's book, the guest "came, went

⁴⁷ The father's name is never called or communicated to the spectator during the film. We know, however, from Pasolini's book titled *Teorema* that his name is Paolo.

away and perhaps will never return”.⁴⁸ After the visit, the members of the family are left with a void, an unfulfilled yearning. They have lost their bourgeois certainty, but they have also failed to grasp this new knowledge that can provide them with the possibility of renewal. The inner emptiness they are left with pushes them into a state of panic and forces them to acknowledge the delusions of bourgeois life. Every member of the family searches for new life meanings but with catastrophic consequences. In juxtaposing the sacred with the bourgeois lifestyle, Pasolini shows how these incompatible realities are bound to clash when they meet. This encounter, however, will not help the members of the family to move forward, as the destruction of bourgeois values is followed by emptiness. In Pasolini’s work, as in De Bruyckere’s work, the Christian theme becomes a communication tool that draws attention to the intrinsic and silently accepted system of values in our society, exposing established and accepted patterns of conduct and activities that may hinder a more spiritually, socially, and politically engaged lifestyle.

The only character that seems to understand the spiritual meaning of this encounter, and who follows through with the transformation, is the maid (image 6-24). Emilia is a religious woman of humble origin, who after meeting the guest, returns to her village and floats over her house.



6-24: P.P.Pasolini, 1968, *Teorema*

The series of sculptures based on Pasolini’s films, (images 6-21, 6-23 and 6-25), addresses human suffering, loneliness and also the relationship and desire connecting human beings to one other. As De Bruyckere suggests, “Much more than it is about the body, it’s about

⁴⁸ Pasolini, P.P. (1968) *Teorema*. Youtube. Available from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qE35w6ddCmQ> [Accessed 12.April 2015].

emptiness and loneliness. At the end we are all very lonely even when you put two bodies together who are really connected like in *Into One-Another III*'.⁴⁹ Desire, too, is seen as a powerful source of transformation but also of destruction, where uncontrollable human impulses become entangled with the sense of self.

In *Into One-Another III To P.P.P.*, two figures are attached to each other, their bodies combined and immobilised, either in a moment of passion, or in a moment of struggle and an attempt to free the body of the burden of the other. This ambiguity, as in the case of Paolo and Francesca discussed above, serves to heighten the tension and introduces both themes of love and protection, and also of causing pain and suffering to our fellow human beings. This inevitable dependency makes us aware of our permeable borders and vulnerability to the other. The dependence on the outside and the other, although feared cannot be escaped, foregrounding the fact that we are always in danger of being hurt by the other, known or unknown, and that the other can be harmed too.



Image 6-25: **Berlinde De Bruyckere**, *Into One-Another III to P.P.P.*, 2010-2011, wax, iron, epoxy, woos glass.

⁴⁹ Bühler, K. (2011). Interview with Berlinde De Bruyckere: *Mysterium Leib*. Berlinde De Bruyckere im Dialog mit Lucas Cranach und Pier Paolo Pasolini. *Kunstmuseum Bern*, 17 October 2011. Available from http://www.kunstmuseumbern.ch/admin/data/hosts/kmb/files/page_editorial_paragraph_file/file_en/12/111019_Interview_De_Bruyckere.pdf?lm=1321628636 [Accessed 29.04.2015].

Into-One-Another III to P.P.P (2010 - 2011), (image 6-25), points to the dangerous repercussions and the transformative power of desire. In representing the body as fragmented but realistic, through form and through the impermanence and fragility of wax as a material, De Bruyckere highlights the vulnerability and ephemerality of human life and human desires. Furthermore, both materiality and the way in which the sculptures show imperfections and sutures are in stark contrast with the traditional representation of the ideal body in art and in the beauty market, advertisement industry and the media in general.

In *Teorema* (1968), the body acquires a particular significance as it symbolises the negative distorted body, the object of consumer society, but also the location of possible redemption. At the beginning of the film, the viewer is confronted with a succession of apparently unconnected scenes, which jump from landscapes, objects to close ups of faces. Commenting on this fragmented narrative, Pasolini himself writes that the order of the scenes is not particularly important (Pasolini, P.P. 1998: 913). In fact, this arbitrary sequence of fragments can be seen as a device with which to communicate the lack of values and coherence inherent in the bourgeoisie.

For Pasolini, the body and its representation played a fundamental role in the fight against the social order imposed by a bourgeois society (Corinti, A. 2008: 8). He questions the functions of the body and its naked exposure in society, pointing to the different censorship practices and double standards that have always dominated our culture, in which the representation of the body conforming to stereotypes of beauty, perfection and homogeneity, is more acceptable than the irregular protrusions, genital organs, expulsion and excretion (Bergonzoni, M. 2011: 303).

Pasolini had a strong aversion to the bourgeois life-style, condemning its emphasis on individualism and consumerism. In his films and writings, he often highlighted how our society forces us to conform since childhood, at the expense of our personality. Conformity in fact, extends to the body, bodily practices and its representation. The institutionalised Christian morality, for instance, sees the body as a source of sin (Schwarz, A. in Paparoni, D. 2007: 143). In *Teorema* (1968), Pasolini criticises the feelings of guilt and unworthiness, as well as the sexual phobia instilled in the believer by institutionalised religion. The guest in *Teorema* (1968), who takes on the role of Christ, does not raise a finger in the act of judgement nor does he punish, instead, by satisfying the sexual desires of every family member, he disrupts pre-set conventions, which highlights both the physical and spiritual needs of human beings.

6.3.6 The Present

Both Pasolini and De Bruyckere refer to past stories and modes of representation, and connect them to the present. In the *Gospel According to Matthew* (1964), for instance, the images of more recent wars overlap with the original images. The soldiers of Herod, for instance, wear German helmets and the uniforms of the Roman soldiers remind us of those of the Italian police (Lorenzi, P and Chomel, L. 1999: 172).

De Bruyckere too, has often mentioned wars, like the Rwandan genocide, or the plight of refugees, as inspiration for her artwork, (ACCA, 2012). These events, however, are never directly reproduced in the artwork. This openness makes her work less time-bound or specific. Her figures, being culturally non-specific or time-bound, can therefore, inhabit the past, the present and the future.

De Bruyckere uses Christian iconography in a non-transgressive way, because its pathos is instantly recognised by a large number of people. Through her layered quotations spanning over centuries, she creates a time-continuum, creating a complex convergence of knowledge and visual clues, which may trigger awe and empathy in the audience. In a similar way to her assembly and casting techniques that introduce time and movement into her sculptures through the joining of body parts created at slightly different times⁵⁰, she uses the technique of linking different epochs through both materials and iconographic quotations, and in doing so, creates a dynamic and layered time component. These layered references of time within her sculptures may inspire connections that overcome spacial-temporal boundaries, encouraging the spectators to engage with the artwork through an affective repetition.

De Bruyckere, in referring to the crucifixion in her sculptures, embraces a specific moment of intense bodily and psychic suffering and adapts and connects it to the present time, in this way, assuming a critical stance towards society. It is, therefore, important to point out that these representations of suffering bodies take place in a society in which the relationship between the sufferer and the observer has undergone an extreme transformation through the influence of the medias.

⁵⁰ See chapter three.



6-26: **Berlinde De Bruyckere**, *Innocence can be Hell*. Series Jelle Luipaard I, 2004

As De Bruyckere explains:

For instance in the series with *Jelle Luipaard* (2004-2005), a male figure is hanging on a stick protruding from a wall. Everybody had the association of Christ hanging on a cross. But at the same time there were images in the news from a bridge in Iraq where soldiers were hanged while a boat passed under the bridge. The image that I still recall shows figures hanging on ropes from a bridge. For me, it was exactly the same that happened to the figures in the studio. I was influenced as much from ancient religious paintings and sculptures as by the image of the bridge. I'm the one in the middle and I make the connection. Otherwise I'm just making versions from an old master. And I'm not interested in that. I try to go further and to add something from today (Berlinde De Bruyckere in Bühler, K. 2012).



6-27: killings of four Blackwater security contractors in Fallujah in March 2004

De Bruyckere's sculptures of fragmented human bodies, through the complex intermingling of quotations spanning several centuries, allude to human beings inhabiting an extended temporal space. Her figures, resembling and quoting past paintings, may be considered old-fashioned, however, through important visual differences she positions her work clearly against the images of the past.

By bringing old masters, Christian iconography, and contemporary mass media together, De Bruyckere builds a bridge between past and present, inviting spectators to ponder on the continuous perpetuation of violence against fellow human beings. The artist, however, does not aim to give answers but in a more philosophical tradition, she elaborates upon a visual discourse without providing the viewer with solutions. She accesses a long tradition of pathos, or 'pathos formula' as Aby Warburgs calls it, to represent human emotional and physical suffering. The potential of her artwork lies, therefore, in the ability to address human suffering, to influence the viewers' perception and understanding by emphasising what human beings share, instead of concentrating on all the differences.

Moreover, in contrast to the fetishized images of 'the body in pain' continuously broadcasted via the media, De Bruyckere's artwork does not point to a particular conflict. The suffering body in the media is often presented to bear testimony and evidence to violence and inhumanity of the other, the aggressor. The images of the suffering body can then be exploited to support or resist political and military interventions. The several art historical references, the anonymity of the represented bodies, and the non-specificity of location, time and conflict in De Bruyckere's work, highlight the horrendous consequences of war and torture without exploiting the images of 'real' suffering human beings. The artist prevents the public and repeated humiliation of the victims by avoiding the direct use of particular contemporary violent events, like the image of the men hanging over the bridge in Iraq image (6-27), or using horses instead of human bodies to represent the devastation of the war. Even though the mass media is 'filled' with images of people suffering, I argue that it is especially works of art, with their 'open-endedness' that make spectators aware of the omnipresence of pain and suffering.

This non-specificity draws attention to the suffering of the body, and in doing so contributes to the formation of the symbolism of pain but without allowing recognition of the 'other'. This prevents relegation of that pain to the body of the 'other'. Her fragmented figures are not objects in memory of particular events, but through combining different events, spaces, materials and aesthetics, the artist draws attention to the similarities between suffering bodies,

emphasising what is shared through time, location and between human beings. She appears to be asking the viewer to consider the possibility that pain and suffering are not only a private and interior matter, but an intersubjective phenomenon, thus opening up the opportunity of its ‘shareability’.

In this chapter, I have shown that De Bruyckere’s employs the suffering body of Christ and the Saints as initial visual vocabulary to convey human suffering. The artist’s use of Christian iconography can be considered non-transgressive and it coincides with the increased tendency in the twenty-first century to use religious imagery to tackle existential themes. In fact, De Bruyckere combines themes and iconography recurrent in Christian tradition, old masters, and contemporary artists in order to create her personal language with which to address what she considers, the ever recurring themes of loneliness, mortality, vulnerability, suffering and desire.

I have analysed how De Bruyckere connects past stories and modes of representation to the present, creating a ‘time continuum’. This technique of linking different epochs through both materials and iconographic quotations, creates a dynamic and layered time component. These layered references of time within her sculptures may inspire connections that overcome spacial-temporal boundaries and connect past and present in order to point out that time and motives of violence may change, but the suffering always remains the same.

I have also highlighted how the differences between the ‘real’ human body, Christian iconography, and De Bruyckere’s fragmented figures influence the reading of the artwork. Indeed, the introduction of important visual elements distancing the figures from past artworks and religious narratives, render the work simultaneously familiar and unfamiliar. Although referring to the ‘real’ body through form, indexicality, materials and size, the artist disrupts the viewers’ gaze through the fragmentation and deformation of the body. Similarly, when quoting Christian imagery and narratives, De Bruyckere disrupts the viewers’ certainties through the referencing and transforming of well-known Christian iconography.

7 The Silenced Others

De Bruyckere's 2012 exhibition in Istanbul: 'The Wound' will begin the main argument of this chapter in relation to what it means to present the skin as broken, scarred, and in a fragmented state. The wound, because of its connection with Christian iconography and its use as a visual trope for the representation of physical and psychic pain, deserves particular consideration, not only as a symbol of suffering but also, in its separated and magnified form, as a symbol of womanhood and sexual differences. The artist's extensive references to Christ's body as bearer of several feminine attributes, will lead to the debate on sex and gender configuration in De Bruyckere's figures.

De Bruyckere's sculptures of fragmented human bodies have been described as 'sexless and headless'.¹ Her sculptures, however, are not sexless, as it is often possible to recognise if the subject represented is male or female. In fact, her sculptures originate from a cast of a sexed body and the artist frequently titles the artwork with the model's name. It is one of the aims of this chapter to explore and to question the role played by sexual difference to the critical reception of her artwork versus her intention as an artist. It could be argued that the sexed body in her sculptures becomes secondary or even irrelevant to the reading of the work. As the artist states, she uses it as a tool and in her view, it is not important if it takes on a female or a male shape.² De Bruyckere's figures could then be read as 'queer' bodies, resisting every categorisation by continuously shifting in between the two genders as defined by traditional Western thought. However, even though the artist might state that sexual difference does not play a role in her artwork, it may still play an important role for the audience.

Drawing on feminist studies that underline the link between gender formation and representation, I will briefly discuss the way in which the female body has been represented in art. I will argue that, the way in which De Bruyckere's representation of both the male and female body through the abject could be interpreted as a continuation of the feminist discourses of 1980s and 1990s, which positioned the body as fragmented and vulnerable. However, the ambiguity in the representation and reading of the sexed body in her artwork requires a theoretical approach that welcomes the co-existence of various points of view. I

¹ De Bruyckere's artwork is described as "bodies made of wax, almost completely covered in wool; imperfect, sexless and headless". Saatchi Gallery. Available from http://www.saatchigallery.co.uk/artists/berlinde_debruyckere.htm [Accessed April 2016]. "There is universality in her headless, sexless figures". Australian Centre of Contemporary Art (ACCA). (2012). Berlinde De Bruyckere: WE ARE ALL FLESH. *ACCA EDUCATION*. Available from <https://www.accaonline.org.au/exhibition/berlinde-de-bruyckere-we-are-all-flesh> [Accessed 3 November 2012].

² Ibid [Accessed 22.11.2012].

will, therefore, focus on the discursive exchange between feminist, queer and ‘post-feminist’ theories and the visual representation of the body in pieces. Understanding these debates about the body will help to contextualise De Bruyckere’s art and will provide a framework for addressing the issue of gender and the re-formulation of subjectivity. In this context, the practice of utilising the androgynous looking body as ‘sexually neutral’ and, therefore, believed to be better suited to embody a ‘shared humanity’, will be questioned. I am aware that spectators’ responses to an artwork are shaped not only by their socio-cultural background, but also by their own personal desires and anxieties. Nonetheless, I contend that the knowledge acquired through a particular situation by a particular group could be transferable and useful to other groups, offering human beings the opportunity to acknowledge their individuality whilst at the same time understand others.

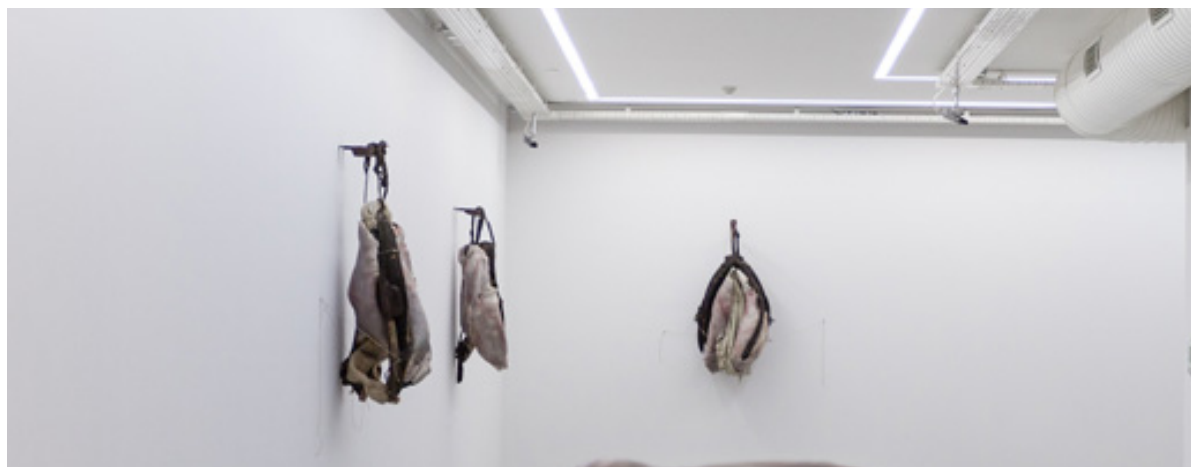
Hemmings subdivides and draws attention to three main feminist narratives: The ‘progress’, the ‘loss’, and the ‘return’ narratives (Hemmings, C. 2011: 15-16). The latter will be particularly helpful for situating De Bruyckere’s fragmented figures within Western feminist discourses. The ‘return narrative’, with its ‘renewed interest in materiality’, will highlight the significance of the body through its focus on embodied and everyday experiences (ibid: 97). The body in her figures is presented as open and as a site of multiple meanings. Her figures inhabit a liminal space, not only through materiality and form, but also by undoing the sex and gender boundaries. Her figures, however, cannot be read as consistently ‘gender-neutral’. This ambiguity in the representation and reading of the sexed body in her artwork also illustrates the difficulties of conveying shared existential issues with a particular and sexed body.

In this chapter I will frequently use terms such as ‘shared emotions or experiences’. I am well aware of the important debates that surround these concepts and the difficulty in finding a definition that allows for both the individuality of emotions as well as a certain ‘shareability’. In the discussion about the social variability of human emotions, there is on one side a tendency to either completely obscure the role played by society and to consider human emotion as universal, or on the other side to describe them as completely socially constructed. I propose that some human emotions can be shared, even though it may not be possible to fully describe them through language. I will, therefore, position the concept of ‘shared emotions’ somewhere in between the universal biological account and the cultural relativistic account of human emotions, exploring the possibility of communicating and sharing emotional content through art, even though the underlying experience may be lived differently.

7.1 Yara the Wound

In 2012, De Bruyckere was invited to show her artwork in the ‘Arter Space’ of the ‘Cukurcuma Hammam’, Istanbul.³ The resulting exhibition was entitled ‘Yara’, which means wound, cut, hurt or trauma in Turkish. The artist, as has been discussed in chapter four, deeply engages with the site and city for which she creates the artwork. In fact, after having seen the space of the gallery, she started looking for a place that was symbolic of the complex and fascinating history of Istanbul. While searching for a space that could represent the passion of the city with its layered history and culture, she came across the ‘Cukurcuma Hammam’, which in the past had been a renowned gay cruising venue.

In *Yara I, II and III* (2011 -2012), which were exhibited in the gallery, De Bruyckere combines wax, epoxy, leather, wood, horsehair, fabric, and iron to form an abstract shape. The translucent quality of the wax, coloured to imitate skin tone, and the roughly sewn cuts on this skin-like material which have healed to form inflamed scars, positions the work in the realm of ‘living’ or ‘having once lived’. *Yara* (2011-2012) (image 7-1 and 7-2), combines familiar elements, such as fabric and leather, in an unfamiliar way in order to generate uncanny feelings in the spectators.



7-1: Berlinde De Bruyckere, *Yara*, 2011-2012, Installation ARTER

Evading an easy classification, the fleshy parts in *Yara* seem to confront the spectator with multiple and unstable interpretations. The possibility of representing animal and human, as

³ The exhibition included many other artworks – such as a headless horse skin, drawings, performances and video work by the artist and choreographer Vincent Dunoyer, which will not be discussed in this thesis. To see the artworks presented in this exhibition see: Sagkan, A. (2012). Berlinde De Bruyckere'den Yara, 7 August 2012. *YouTube*. Available from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P-EbPPUrVas> [Accessed 26.05.2015].

well as embodying ‘formless’ flesh after agonising metamorphoses, makes the sculptures ambiguous and difficult to position.

Additionally, the way in which these artworks are displayed enhances the recurrent sense of ‘inbetweenness’ and evokes doubts about how to read this artwork. De Bruyckere’s *Yara / The Wound* (2011-2012) (image 7-1) hangs from the wall as paintings do but is also suspended like an animal corpse in a butcher’s shop. Unlike paintings, however, these artworks invade the viewer’s physical space (Fer, B. 1999: 32).



7-2: **Berlinde De Bruyckere:** *Yara III*, 2011-2012, wax, epoxy, iron armature, leather, wood, horsehair, fabric, iron and blanket, 120 X 65 x 35 cm

Placed at eye level and protruding from the wall in a way that is difficult to ignore, *Yara / The Wound* (2011-2012), is ‘in your face’ in a similar way to the ‘central core imagery’ used by some feminist artists in the late 1960s and 1970s to promote debates and new interpretations of what it means to be a woman. However, it is only when De Bruyckere’s artworks in the series *Yara* (2011-2012) are juxtaposed to the images the artist used as a source of inspiration, that the semantic coding of the work shifts and alongside the reading of ‘vaginal imagery’, the

sculptures acquire an additional meaning.⁴ In fact, the artist found a medical photographic album (ca. 1890), in a library in Istanbul, which portrayed women beside their removed cancerous body parts stored in formaldehyde (Arter, 2012). The photographs in the book, some of which are reproduced in the catalogue accompanying the exhibition, are of veiled women revealing the scars left by surgery.



7-3: Photograph Album: Ovarian Cancer Surgery

7-4: Photograph Album: gynaecological procedures

Photographer: Nicolas Andriomenos ca. 1890

These old images project a sense of ‘scientific’ voyeurism and an inquisitive fascination for the female body, its inside and functions.⁵ The photographer has a Greek name and is therefore probably not Muslim but possibly orthodox Christian. The eye of the camera and the gaze of the doctor/photographer coincide with that of the viewer, making them the subject of knowledge and making the images of the women object of knowledge. The photographs serve as a record, but also as a means to gain privileged access to the inside of the female body. There is a sense that the medic-photographer assumed that the detached and abject body part would be more understandable if portrayed alongside its previous owner so as to

⁴ For a discussion on ‘Central Core Imagery’ see page 170ff in Jones A. (2012). *Seeing Differently: A History and Theory of Identification and the Visual Arts*. New York & Oxon: Routledge.

⁵ Only if you consider the female body as incomplete or injured. This resonates with Lacan’s theory of lack. Check Irigaray’s arguments against this highly phallogentric view.

counterbalance the subversion of the inside / outside dichotomy at work in these photographs. The women completely covered and appropriately veiled as required by the Muslim custom, stand next to a little round table with a vase on top containing the diseased body part. The dress exposes the scar left by surgery through an oval shaped gap, revealing a naked area around the navel. Their faces, wearing a serious expression, look out from a similar oval shaped opening left by the headscarf. Often the women place their hand on the transparent vase, as if to silently claim ownership over the ‘estranged’ body part. The scars on the women’s skin become then the memory of the wound, a constant reminder of the ‘incompleteness’ of their body.

7.2 Healed Wounds

The prominence of scars trying to close the rupture and interruption of the skin caused by the wounds plays a significant role in De Bruyckere’s artwork in general and in the series *Yara* (2011 – 2012), in particular. In fact, De Bruyckere’s figures, unlike the ideal image of the classical figurative sculptures or the idealised body in the media, never conceal their scars, imperfections or their fragility (Wieg, C. 2012: 1). Scars are nothing more than evidence of a physical wound that has been naturally repaired by the body; however, they can become permanent markings and testimonies of past painful experiences. Indeed, whereas the wound may refer to something that is meant to be forgotten or healed, the scar, as a constant and visible reminder of the wound, will become the connection to the past that cannot be forgotten. The scars in *Yara* (2011 – 2012) (images 7-2) become then a reflection on both physical and psychological human suffering. As Ansen describing De Bruyckere’s artwork confirms, “each sculpture emphasises scars or wounds, which become traces and clues to inner workings” (Ansen, S. 2012: 47).

The scars in *Yara* (2011 – 2012) (image 7-2) may be seen as symbolic of healed physical and emotional wounds. However, it is essential to point out that the presence of a scar on the skin does not necessarily imply the absence of inner pain. As every spectator who has had surgery is aware, the healing of the skin after surgery does not always coincide with the complete cessation of pain. Pain may lessen with time but the body, after a wounding experience, seldom completely returns to its original state. Scars may present the wounded body as whole and healed on the surface, but pain and fragmentation may still be present and hidden inside.

Furthermore, wounding often presupposes an act of violence. The devastating consequences of physical violence, however, are seldom limited to physical suffering. A physical wound perpetrated by a violent act, may superficially heal but will often leave behind psychic suffering and shame. The scars on the skin of De Bruyckere's figures, therefore, point contemporaneously to the ability of bodily wounds to superficially heal, as well as the inability of psychic wounds to heal completely. It is in this context, that the symbol of the wound, which cannot be considered a direct agent of suffering per se, becomes a tool with which to visually and conceptually convey pain (Scarry, E. 1987: 16).

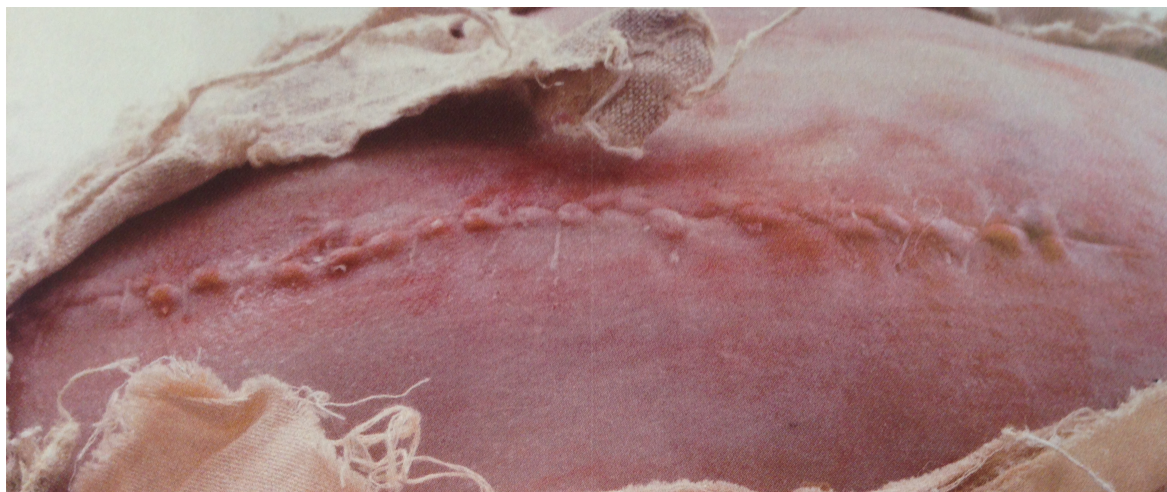
Freud had already connected the image of the more tangible bodily wound with psychological suffering. He described hysterical behaviour as "psychological wounding that escaped narrative which is then continually re-enacted through the body" (Robson, K. 2004: 37). In his view, trauma and loss are types of physical violence that wound the 'self'. In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, he highlights the connection between psychical and physical wounds through the description of trauma as the outside reaching the inside unmediated; as an event so sudden and unexpected that cannot be processed and recognised in time. For Freud, a psychic wound is not available to consciousness as it happens too unexpectedly, forcing the subject to a continuous repetition of the painful event (Freud, S. 1961: 6 and 23).

Echoing Freud Cixous describes the loss of her father during her childhood as a psychic wound, which is constantly re-lived and re-enacted in later stages of her life. Indeed, psychological wounds seem to lack the healing quality of the human skin and tend to remain open, as Cixous writes, "On the inside of my brain the very slight bleeding of a small lack of forgetting, a minuscule wound would not close its eyes. The five scars on my foot like a clumsy star had closed" (Cixous, H. 2005: 157). Cixous equates her inner anguish to a wound that cannot heal because the wound created by her loss will continually be re-lived and made present.

In *Yara* (2011- 2012) the sutured wounds, given visual prominence through the rough stitches and the juxtaposition of soft textiles, may also be seen as a reminder of the damning, lingering effects that violence against other human beings has on both mental and physical memory. In this case, the body becomes the vessel through which suffering, both physical and psychical, is conveyed and the breaching of the skin becomes the standard of reference for every act of violence.

The body then, as a site of violent inscription, through the trope of the wound, represents the counterbalance to the silenced 'others'. 'The Wound' in *Yara I, II, III* (2011-2012) (image

7- 1) can be seen as giving a voice to the women silenced by patriarchal and medical discourses depicted in the medical photographic book (image 7-3 and 7-4). Moreover, just as the women were, and still are, silenced and categorised as ‘other’ through patriarchal discourses, all suffering human beings, whether through war, geographical displacement or personal predicament, can be seen as silenced by discourses aimed at maintaining existing binary positions of subalternity.⁶



7-6: **Berlinde De Bruyckere**, Detail of *Yara I*, (2011-2012),
wax, epoxy, iron armature, leather, wood, horsehair, fabric, iron and blanket. 125 x 116 x 41 cm

The wounded body, in De Bruyckere’s work, can therefore, be seen as a place where meanings collide and create a plurality of possible interpretations. *The Wound* (2012 – 2013) then, not only draws attention to the bodily suffering of the individual but also to the wounded body of a nation or of a particular ethnic group.

⁶ In her article “Can the Subaltern Speak?” Gayatri C. Spivak raises the question of the representation of women voices and point of views in history books and whether a history with women as subject is even possible. Discussing the ancient Hindu practice of sacrifice of the widow after the death of the husband, Spivak shows how the intervention of colonialists and of Western “intellectuals”, who claim to rescue the women from this inhumane practice, fail to consider women’s desires and their freedom of choice. Moreover, claiming of speaking on their behalf, Western commentators silence the subaltern (Spivak, G. C. 2010, 50). For Spivak the active involvement of women in the history of anti-British-colonial insurgency in India has been excluded from the official history of national independence. As she writes: “Within the effaced itinerary of the subaltern subject, the track of sexual difference is doubly effaced. The question is not of female participation in insurgency, or the ground rules of the sexual division of labour, for both of which there is ‘evidence’. It is, rather, that, both as object of colonialist historiography and as subject of insurgency, the ideological construction of gender keeps the male dominant. If, in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow” (Spivak, G. C. 2010: 41).

7.3 The Materiality of the Invisible

The theme of the marked and wounded body, like ‘Oedipus Rex’ in Greek mythology, has fascinated and inspired artists working in many different mediums.⁷ However, it is the image of the wounded body of Christ that is deeply rooted in Western thought and seems to both challenge and move artists and spectators alike. Within the Christian narrative, the spectator is able to give a certain materiality to suffering. A materiality that, through the agency of the object inflicting pain, such as the cross, nails or sword, using what Elaine Scarry defines as the “language of agency”, creates a connection that De Bruyckere utilises to bridge the gap between her wounded figures and the lived body of the viewers (Scarry, E. 1987: 15-16).

In the series, *Schmerzmann* (2006), for instance, De Bruyckere refers to the tradition of representing Christ’s flagellated and tortured body after the crucifixion. The artist detaches the represented bodies from reality not only through the abstract appearance of the torso but also by choosing a title that refers to a particular moment in Christ’s life instead of using the model’s name, as she often does. The title, *Man of Sorrows*, aims to indicate the universality of suffering. As the artist contends:

The title *Schmerzmann*, suggests a sense of detachment. It is an image of a suffering man, much more universal and abstract than a portrait. The title sums up the whole meaning and emotional range of this series of figures and cannot really be translated into *Man of Sorrow* (De Bruyckere, B. 2006).

The body of *Schmerzmann V* (2006) (image 7-7) emptied of all its vital inner organs, like a piece of meat in the window of a butcher’s shop, hangs on display on the iron column. Meat, “the common zone of man and beast”, draws attention to the fact that the “man who suffers is a piece of meat” (Deleuze, G. 2014: 17). De Bruyckere’s representation of the body as flesh, fragmented, distorted and inhabiting a liminal space between life and decomposition, conveys an attitude to humanity that is immensely different from the ideal image of Man. The artist, in an interview, asserted that the body she represents belongs to “a fragile man, ... a man who wants to have nothing to do with the world in which he lives...” (De Bruyckere, B. 2006).

As in many of De Bruyckere’s sculptures, the body in image 7-7, is presented as vulnerable and susceptible to painful wounding from the outside. But how does the representation of the wound, in De Bruyckere’s figures, as a metaphor for both physical and

⁷ For a discussion of Odysseus’s Scar see chapter one in Auerbach, E. (2013). *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, Princeton: Princeton university Press.

psychical suffering, influence the debate on the inside / outside, which Derrida describes as “the matrix of all possible opposition”? (Derrida, J. 1993: 103).



7-7: **Berlinde De Bruyckere**: *Schmerzemann V*, 2006
epoxy, wax, iron, 420 x 80 x 80 cm

The wound, the opening that gives the spectator an opportunity to look inside the body, is a recurrent and vital theme in the oeuvre of De Bruyckere.⁸ As she states:

A hole is something that grabs your attention and it makes you very curious to uncover what is inside.
... These black holes play a very important part in all my works (De Bruyckere, B. in Burley, I. 2012).

De Bruyckere’s figures, in fact, often depicted as open and exposed to continuous contact with the surroundings, seem to highlight the human predicament of needing human contact and bodily exchange with the outside in order to survive. These exchanges, however, have the potential to bring with it danger and suffering.

⁸ Interestingly, during the nineteenth century, anatomists believed in the possibility to observe the invisible side of a human being during dissection (Bronfen, E. 1992: 4).

The binary coupling: outside / inside, where the inside represents the positive, the mind, interiority and therefore, the 'self'; and the outside which is seen as a mere container of the self, influenced enormously the 'conceptualisation' and representation of the body in the West (Potts, A. 2002: 102).⁹ The wound in *Schmerzenmann V* (2006) (image 7-7), however, is not solely an opening pushing through the surface separating the outside from the inside, but it is also a transgression of a surface that we prefer to imagine closed and intact. Wieg, for instance, describes the physical lesions of De Bruyckere's figures as:

... incision(s) in the body, whether real or pictorial ...[that] shatter the continuum of the surface and the certitude of its continuation. These ruptured, fragmented, at times monstrous body images, pose a challenge in their exposure and foreignness. They eliminate and contradict our craving for continuity and security (Wieg, C. 2011: 195).

Indeed, when the inside of the body is exposed and displayed for everybody to see, as in *Schmerzmann V*, the vulnerability and mortality of the physical body becomes 'tangible' and existential suffering may take on a material form, becoming more shareable through a visual vocabulary. For Robson, for instance, the vulnerable and wounded body is the best way to visualise emotional suffering (Robson, K. 2004: 32). Additionally, as Ansen observes, "the wound and the lesion convey invisible suffering" (Ansen, S. in De Bruyckere, B. 2012: 11). Representing the human body as open and fragmented, De Bruyckere highlights the connection and indivisible condition between existence and flesh, drawing attention to the fact that human beings have an inside that is both physical and 'emotional'. As De Bruyckere explains, "The wound is a sign of being, a hole that makes you aware that the body has an inside. Through the wound, our inner side can be visible to the outside world, which is an essential existential experience" (De Bruyckere, B. in Burley, I. 2012). In a way, the massive wound in 'Schmerzmann V' (2006) gives voice to the mute pain of this vulnerable and emaciated human body. The emerging scream overcomes the limits of language by addressing the spectator directly. The wound then, simultaneously highlights what we do not know and represents the possibility of accessing what both survivors of traumatic events and spectators have not yet grasped (Caruth, C. 1996: 4).

⁹ Derrida draws attention to the significant socio-political consequences of all hierarchical dichotomies stating that "In order for these contrary values (good/evil, true/false, essence/appearance, inside/outside, etc.) to be in opposition, each of the terms must be simply external to the other, which means that one of these oppositions (the opposition between inside and outside) must already be accredited as the matrix of all possible opposition" (Derrida, J. 1993: 103).

This opening, into the hidden and invisible inside in image 7-7, may also promote reflections on the unknown; on the concealed and unconscious desires and impulses. The wound, when interpreted as an internal traumatic split, comes to symbolise our invisible inner psychic and existential life. Always already present, the inner wound, similar to the huge opening dominating *Schmerzmann V* (2006), represents the inner void, the Lacanian ‘lack’, the “presence of a hollow” (Lacan, J. 2004: 180), “a void” (ibid: 242) on which the ‘self’ is constructed. A lack that instigates the unknown and never fulfilled desires that ultimately defines who we are. The pivotal role played by this inner void in the formation of subjectivity, transforms the body into mere flesh around an internal emptiness (hole). The external and material wound in *Schmerzmann V* (2006), thus makes visible the internal ‘original lack’, by displaying it externally on the skin, pointing out the enormous gap between the ideal self, seen in the mirror, and the empty bag of skin the individual may feel he/she really is. The role of the body in this sculpture, devoid of recognisable personal traits and reduced to an empty container, may be seen as a vehicle by which to visualise this interior process; providing a language with which to describe our deepest inner emotional life.

De Bruyckere’s use of the wound as a metaphor for communicating ‘invisible’ emotional or psychic pain raises interesting questions. Firstly, the wound, as the manifestation of psychic trauma, is based on the visual representation of bodily pain. This fact presupposes previous understanding of physical pain and it assumes knowledge of a link / similarity between physical and psychical pain as well as the recognition that physical pain is more representable and shareable than psychic pain. As discussed in chapter two, scholars in various fields of research disagree on the ‘representability’ of both physical and psychical pain.

Scarry highlights the difficulties associated with the representation and understanding of physical trauma, she maintains that it is not possible to understand or share it. In her view, pain not only resists objectification and, therefore, language but it also “actively destroys it”. The inexpressibility of pain derives from the fact that physical pain resists the “objectification in language”, because physical “pain –unlike any other state of consciousness –has no referential content” (Scarry, E. 1987: 4-5). Pain, as a private and lonely experience, isolates and silences the sufferers, depriving them of the ability to communicate and thus, catapulting them back into a pre-language state (Scarry, E. 1987: 4). Therefore, according to this standpoint, “to have pain is to have certainty” and knowledge; “to hear about pain is to have doubt”, pointing to the impossibility of describing or representing somebody else’s pain (Scarry, E. 1987: 13). Pain is invisible and what the onlooker sees are the body’s responses to it. These responses, such as

the distortion of the body, aimed at describing what is happening inside the body, are open-ended and can be interpreted in many different ways. The representation of pain and trauma is then often restricted to the depiction of the causes or physical reactions to physical pain, limiting the intersubjective communication to the tangible expression of it. This lack of direct and unambiguous connection between the body in pain and its representations, does not necessarily imply the complete impossibility to convey it and to engage the spectator emphatically. One could also argue that, believing in the incommunicability of pain may facilitate the denial and discrediting of the suffering of others. This inaccessibility, ‘unshareability’ and doubts “regarding the pain of other”, may raise questions about the responsibilities and responses of the ones witnessing the suffering of fellow human beings (Sontag, S. 2003). Additionally, the belief in a complete un-representability of pain and suffering could also be very restrictive and disabling for visual artists that intend to convey the suffering and traumas of victims of violence and wars. Indeed, De Bruyckere’s artwork, combines art history and mythology together with a variety of visual and sensory elements to convey the anguish of the other. Anguish does not imply solely physical hurt, but often also includes emotional pain and trauma.

The ‘unshareable’ nature of pain has been criticised by many scholars for whom pain has a ‘social’ aspect and acquires its meaning from an interpersonal perspective (Sullivan, M. 2001: 146). Although there is agreement that every experience is personal and cannot be completely shared, the emphasis is put on the act of communication (Van Hooft, S. 2003: 257), pointing to the recognition and acknowledgment of the pain of others as a more significant matter.

The most important question becomes whether or not it is better to accept the actual “inadequate telling” of painful events in the hope of making people aware of these traumas and maybe prompting changes, or instead forcing trauma “to a mystified silence” (Kaplan, A. and Wang, B. 2003: 12). Visual and written representations of trauma do not only function as collective memories; as channels through which traumatic events can be transmitted to the next generation and maybe shared, but also create “[their] own reality” (ibid: 14). Moreover, Ludwig Wittgenstein does not consider the externalisation of pain, such as cries and physical expressions of suffering, an incomplete and imperfect attempt to communicate it, but sees them as belonging to the pain process itself. Similar to silence in language, the absence of visibility in the process of pain is a constitutive part of its expression (Wittgenstein, L. 1992: 29-33).

Additionally, recent neuro-scientific studies empirically support the ability of human beings to notice and respond to the emotions of the other (Freedberg et al 2002). To explore the ‘working’ of intersubjectivity and empathy, scientists have investigated the neurological mechanism behind the perception of the ‘pain of other’. The findings confirm the existence of a link between feeling pain and seeing the pain of the other (Jackson, P. L. et al. 2005: 771). These scientific studies also highlight the importance of visual representation in the process (Schott, G. D. 2015), as experiments show that the same region of the brain activated during the time of pain is also active while watching images of somebody else in pain (Freedberg, D. & Gallese, V. 2007; Schott, P. 2015; Jackson, P. 2005).¹⁰

This contradiction between the ‘unshareability’ of physical and emotional pain and the need for expression in order to facilitate recovery, influences the way people engage with experienced and represented suffering. Artworks, such as ‘Schmerzensmann V’ (2006), offer a way in which to articulate both, bodily and psychic trauma, highlighting at the same time, the impossibility of ever speaking in the past tense about it. In fact, De Bruyckere’s figures may refer to and quote the past through form and materials, but her figures always seem to express present traumas, remaining therefore, suspended in a perpetual re-enactment. Helen Cixous, who uses bodily wounds to describe psychic trauma in her writing, agrees that traumatic events cannot be forgotten or left in the past, because they are made present in the act of continuously re-living them (Robson, K. 2004: 61).

The wound in *Schmerzensmann V* (2006) is deep and takes possession of the whole figure, cutting through it. The entire body seems to sink into the wound and to escape through the blackness cast by the shadow of the deep and dense hole. *Schmerzensmann* (2006), completely emptied of his bloody internal organs, is presented to the spectator as a clean ‘shell’, a figure beyond hope. The opening, not just a superficial cut visible on the skin, signifies the impossibility of healing. In this way, the wound in image 7-7, ‘transcends’ its materiality in order to connect to the emotional wound that cannot be healed. The visible, physical wound in *Schmerzensmann V* (2006), bears silent witness of an intense trauma. Trauma, that Caruth describes “as a wound inflicted not upon the body but the mind” (Caruth, C. 1996: 3-4). Indeed, referencing Freud, Caruth points out that the psychic wound “is not like the wound of the body, a simple and healable event, but rather an event that ... is not available to consciousness until it imposes itself again, repeatedly, in the nightmares and repetitive

¹⁰ Scientists confirmed that “the anterior cingulate and anterior insula cortices, region often reported as being part of the pain affective system, are recruited when watching someone else’s pain” (Jackson, P.L. 2005: 777).

actions of the survivors” (Caruth C. 1996: 4). The deep and permanent wound in *Schmerzemann V* (2006), not only makes the spectators aware of the impossibility of ever healing, but also make them conscious of the ‘embodiness’ of human beings. It is in fact, especially during times of sickness that one tends to be more aware of having a body. The wound can be considered the memory of personal bodily trauma externalised for the public to see and reflect upon. The visible wound then becomes the symbol of shared suffering and shared memories.

The wound, however, is also an excess of interiority. Instead of thinking of an external cut to the skin as a means to reach the inside, the wound becomes the sign of ‘interiority’ bursting directly through the tight skin. An interiority that the stitches in *Yara* (2011- 2012) (image 7-5), can barely contain. Indeed, examining the representation of psychological trauma using the illustration of the physical wound may also encourage spectators to rethink the mind and body relationship. In fact, when the inside of the body is considered a shared space between body and psyche, not only the inside / outside dichotomy is questioned, but also the Cartesian separation between body and mind may cease to make sense.

7.4 The Wound as Female

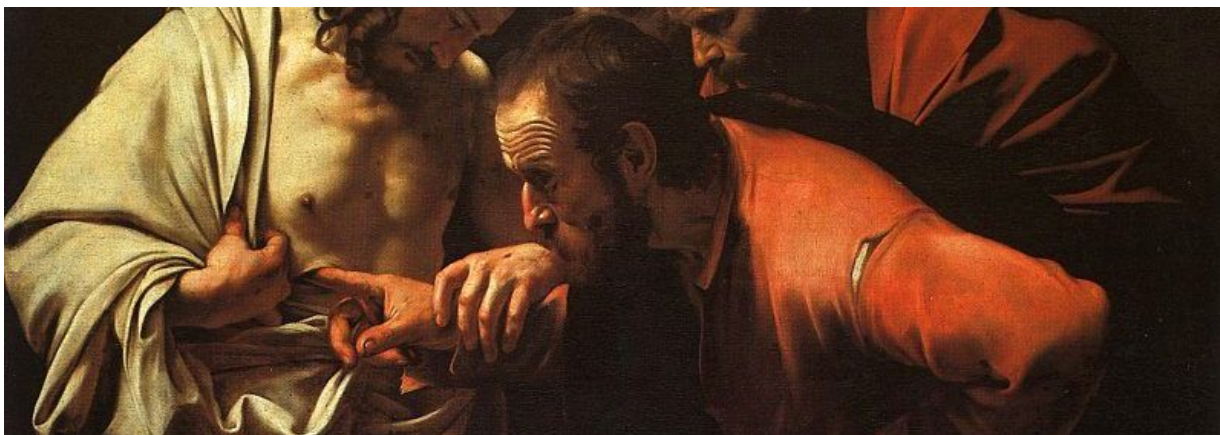
The wound as metaphor, however, is more than just rupture, transgression, puncture and piercing. The wound has also been interpreted as symbolic of life, becoming and change.¹¹ Even in a ‘post-Christian’ era, the wound maintains its ‘double’ connotation as a divine symbol of Christ’s suffering on the Cross to save humanity, and as a symbol of procreation embodied by the female sexual organ. De Bruyckere, for instance, described the wound as,

a sign of change, a gate to another sphere, to a new life—if we think about it, the vagina is a wound—to another state of consciousness, because feeling pain—obviously depending on the intensity of the pain—can make you forget about thinking and reduce you to a flesh experience. At the same time, if speaking in religious terms, this experience means a stage of transcendence (De Bruyckere, B. in Burley, I. 2012).

Indeed, the wound, with its connection to disruption and defilement, not only implies suffering but also embodies procreation and life. Even the language used to describe the wound in

¹¹ The interpretation of the vagina as a wound presupposes the highly phallogentric view of female body as incomplete or injured and resonates with Lacan’s theory of lack.

religious texts indicates penetration. The male believer's response to Christ's wound can be seen to derive from both the sword that inflicted the wound penetrating the flesh and Thomas' need, as represented in Caravaggio's painting (7-8), to touch and enter the wound with his finger in order to believe (John 20: 25; Lochrie, K. 1994: 41).

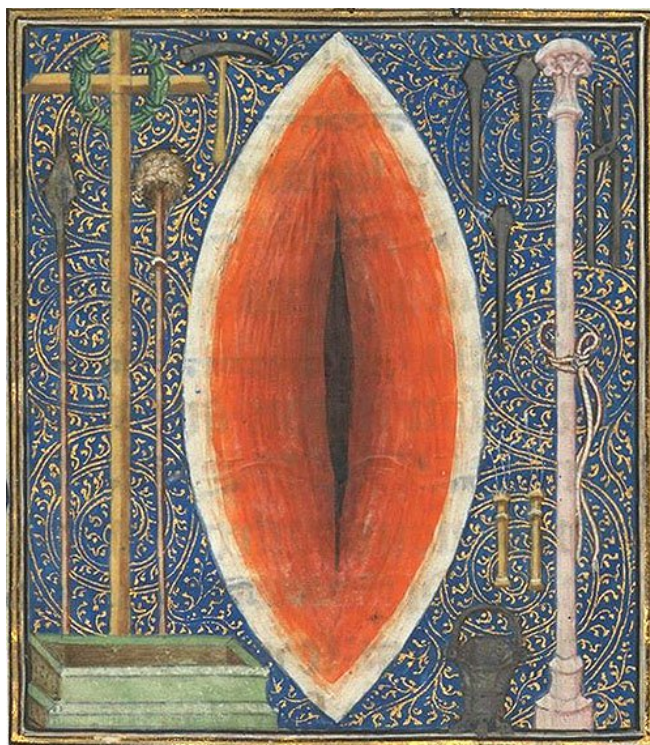


7-8: Detail of Caravaggio (Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio): *The incredulity of Saint Thomas*, 1601-1602

As Lochrie points out, the Latin word for Wound 'vulnus' sounds similar to vulva (Lochrie, K. 1994: 70). In the late medieval time, for instance, the representation of Christ's wound was often depicted in detail, isolated from the rest of the body and occupying an entire page (McCracken, P. 2003: 108). It was considered to be the origin of faith, "foci of devotion", the place where the believer could reach Christ's heart (Smith, K. in Gertsman E. et al. 2012: 61). When Christ's wound is reoriented and presented vertically, it has been connected to the origin of life. There is a long tradition in literature and in the visual arts, to interpret Christ's wound, especially its shape, colour and the way this wound may feel to the touch, as a symbol of the vulva (Faull, K. 2011: 71; Frank, G. 2004: 207). Christ's bleeding side wound, which reminds us visually of the female cycle, as well as the painful labour in giving birth, points to a conception of Christ's body as being both a suffering body and a generative body as Christ gave birth to the church. This connection between Christ's wound and female physiology creates a link between the sacred and the sexual (Faull, K. 2011: 73).

Illustrations of the vertical wound, as in image (7-9), represent a powerful symbol of creative power and seem to confirm the fact that Christ's wound, as a place of knowledge, is constantly engendered by the erotic; a "vagina-like object of desire, a transference of the dangerously open body of woman in all her horrifying 'difference'" (Camille, M. 1994: 71). Wounds, in De Bruyckere's figures, whether as a trope for pain through the Christian

iconographic quotations or whether as female physiology with its danger of defilement, provide a material form to the interior experience.



7-9: *The Side Wound of Christ* from the Psalter and Hours of Bonne of Luxembourg, Duchess of Normandy, Jean Le Noir, before 1349

American feminist scholars in the 1970s voiced a profound concern about the ‘real’ and psychological effects of the misogynistic and heterosexual prejudice in religious language (Daly, M. 1973: 80; Ramey Mollenkott, V. 1976 in Thatcher, A. 2011: 137-139). This concern was later shared by queer and postcolonial theology, which pointed out how Christian iconography has deeply influenced the way we look, understand and conceive the body, which in turn effects our behaviour (McAvan, E. 2012: 12).¹² Emphasising the difference between “the word ...made flesh” (John 1:4), and “the word made man”, feminists in their biblical studies chose to emphasise the medieval representation of Christ as an androgynous figure whom, although born male, was endowed with both female and male qualities (Guðmundsdóttir, A. 2010: 21).¹³

¹² It may be of interest to point out the connection between monotheism and the position of women in society. The claims in Christianity that man was created in God’s image (Old Testament) and his incarnation in Jesus (New Testament) have certainly influenced the roles and power relations between genders. Moreover, the Catholic’s narrative of Mary’s immaculate conception imposes an impossible standard upon women.

¹³ See also Leonard Swidler, S. (1971). “Jesus Was a Feminist”, *The Catholic World*, Jan. 1971, 177-183; Jewett, P. (1975). *Man as Male and Female: A Study in Sexual Relationships from a Theological Point of View*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans. Conrad Wahlberg, R. (1975). *Jesus According to a Woman*, New York: Paulist.

Christianity, with its millennia of history, has greatly contributed to positioning the male body as representing ‘universal suffering’, marking and reinforcing gender’s boundaries. Even in Europe, the most secular continent, Christianity still influences its inhabitants’ everyday life; from the law to gender roles. The subject of the crucifixion, for instance, has fostered the representation of the suffering and grieving body for centuries. Christ’s body, even though subject to physical suffering in the ‘Passion’, and depicted as fragmented and passive, which were considered female attributes, was still interpreted as the most perfect body. In fact, one of the aims of many representations and interpretations of the crucified Christ was to maintain the illusion of wholeness and unity of Christ’s body. Christ’s body, perfect body among perfect and unified male bodies, successfully maintained wholeness, even while going through the most horrific fragmenting pain (Sawday, J. 2013: 217). Through this connection to Christ’s suffering, the deformed and violated male body may be seen as something to be glorified and admired (Brintnall, K. 2011: 170). Christ’s image is based on the assumption that maleness can stand in for ‘universal’ humanity, even though as Radford explains “the historical particularity of his maleness is essential to his on-going representation” (Radford Ruether, R. in Loades, A: 1990:147).

Alongside the representation of Christ’s body as male and whole, always coexisted the tradition of representing his body as a “nurturing female” (Sawday, J. 2006: 217). Already during the Middle Ages, the iconography used to represent the body of Christ encompassed several features normally ascribed to women, drawing in this way attention to the fluid construction of sex and gender boundaries during the early Christian times. Additionally, in the Old Testament, God is compared to a loving mother that nurtures, nourishes and comforts her children (Reinhard, K. 2007).¹⁴

¹⁴ The concept of ‘*Jesus as Mother*’ is implied in Julian of Norwich’s book: *A Revelation of Love*. She is considered to be the first female to have written and published a book in English (1395). She uses motherhood as an important theological metaphor and states “*and thus I saw that God enioyeth that he is our fader, God enioyeth that he is our moder, and God enioyeth that he is our very spouse, and our soule is his lovid wife. And Criste enioyeth that he is our broder, and Iesus enioyeth that he is our savior*” (Norwich, J in Corless, R. 1995). The concept of “Christ as mother” is reiterated in Julian’s understanding of trinity, as Reinhard explains, “Julian uses “mother” to describe all three persons of the Trinity, but she overwhelmingly favours Christ, the second Person of the Trinity, in her exploration of God’s motherhood. Julian associates the power of God with a fatherly trait, characteristic of Creator, with wisdom as a motherly trait, characteristic of Christ, and with love as a lordly (or spousal) trait, characteristic of the Spirit” (Reinhard, K.L. 2007).

7.5 Guilty Pleasure: The Representation of the Androgynous Body in Berlinde De Bruyckere.

Jelle Luipaard (2004 – 2005) (image 7-10), is a body crucified on a metal hook protruding from the wall. Split in half and emaciated, this body alludes to the suffering body of Christ. Christian iconography, emphasising Christ's corporeality, draws attention to the similarities between Christ's body and the body of 'ordinary' people, creating in this way a connection between Christ's agonising suffering on the cross and human suffering. De Bruyckere's sculptures, referring to Christ's passion, may evoke strong emotions of pity in the spectator through corporeal identification and a sense of shared humanity with the divine. De Bruyckere's representation of *Jelle Luippard* (2004 – 2005), however, is not only reminiscent of Christ as a man dying on the cross, but it is also a reminder of Christ: the bearer of several feminine attributes.



7-10: Berlinde De Bruyckere, *Jelle Luipaard*, 2004 – 2005'
wax, wood, iron, epoxy, 175 x 64 x 36

The gender of *Jelle Luipaard* (2004- 2005) is ambiguous, as the nakedness of this crucified body is covered by the hook / cross that at the same time sustains and divides the body. The title of the artwork; the name of the model, unlike most of her figures, does not immediately dispel this ambiguity. Jelle, a Dutch male name, is in fact sometimes also used as a female name. Nonetheless, we know that the model of this sculpture was a man, as De Bruyckere, commenting on her 'Jelle Luipaard' (2004 - 2005) series of works, notes that these sculptures were "modelled on a male body, [and] depict a fragile man, not a macho hero" (De Bruyckere, B. 2006).

The legs and feet in *Jelle Luipaard* (2004 – 2005), although seemingly precisely reproduced through casting, cannot be unmistakably recognised as male. *Jelle Luipaard* (2004 -2005), inhabits an 'in between space', not only through materiality and form, but also by undoing the sex and gender boundaries and positioning the body as androgynous.

Does the body of *Jelle Luipaard* (2004 – 2005), which could be interpreted as both female and male, inhabit the utopian lost space in which males and females were harmoniously fused? Does the connection to the iconography of Christ on the cross, point to an androgynous body; a male body endowed with both female and male qualities? Or does De Bruyckere's representation in *Jelle Luipaard* resist the application of all categories?

Though *Jelle Luipaard* (2004 -2005), is a cast from a male body, the androgynous look of the sculpture seems to point to a time and space in which human beings were not divided into polarised genders.¹⁵ Referring to Christ, endowed with both male and female virtues, the artist not only highlights the androgynous qualities of the figure, but she also positions it in a liminal space in which gender categories become fluid, ambivalent and undetermined, questioning in this way a fixed notion of identity. The gender ambivalence and the fluid identities draw attention to a tendency in a patriarchal society to classify everything according to binary oppositions, such as male and female, day and night, good and bad, in which order and precise 'definitions' are in preference to the undefined and ambivalent. Choosing ambivalence over stability and order, the artist seems to invite the viewer to welcome a plurality of possibilities and meanings.

Interestingly, in artwork referencing Christ and his Passion, as in *Schmerzensman* (image 7-7), *Pietà* (image 4-7) and *Jelle Luipaard* (image 7-10), De Bruyckere utilises the male body.

¹⁵ In his philosophical text, *Symposium* (385-370BC), Plato presents the ideas that androgynous beings were one of the three different creatures, each with two sets of arms, legs, sex and one head and two identical faces, which originally inhabited the world. Zeus fearing that these perfect beings would rebel against him split them in half (Russel, E. 2009: 135).

In contrast to feminist artists such as Mary Beth Edelson (1933-) and Renée Cox (1960-), who in their artwork, replaced Christ with a female body in order to address the role of women in society and in the art world, De Bruyckere seems to prefer to keep with the convention of the 'saviour of the world' as male. But does androgyny really liberate humans from binary oppositions? Can the category 'human', transcend gender in order to address existential topics concerning the whole of humanity? Does De Bruyckere's way of representing the body support the idea that she is seeking to portray a 'universal human' voice? Or does the androgynous body in *Jelle Luipaard* (2004 – 2005) just align itself with the 'universal masculine'?

The androgynous body has a long history in Western culture, as Greek sculptures and writings attest, and it is often used to represent humankind in its most purified state (Nagel, A. 2011: 99). Symbolising the harmonious fusion of male and female, the androgynous, it has been suggested, encompasses the reconciliation of all opposites. From this perspective androgyny embodies a state of perfection and totality and thus retains a spiritual quality (Russel, E. 2009: 135). Even though androgyny is understood as the combination of both male and female characteristics, more often the term is used for males with feminine attributes or for male artists endowed with female perception and sensibility (Zamorano, A. 1996: 196).

The term androgyny is a combination of the Greek words 'andros', which means male and 'gynos', which means female. In the composite word 'androgyny', the male term 'andros' is placed in front of the female side gynos. It is understandable, therefore, that the term has come to signify a man with female qualities. Indeed, for feminist writers, the concept of androgyny poses several problems, not only because historically it had been used to describe the masculine with feminine qualities, but also because the concept perpetuates the notion that females are defined in relation to males (Sypher, E. B. 1983: 189). Changing the order of the words and placing 'gyny' at the beginning, would create the composite 'gynandrous'. Gynandros, a less common term, still perpetuates binary thinking by defining the female in relation to the male.

Androgynists within the 'second wave of feminism', sought to transcend traditional feminine and masculine stereotypes by welcoming the combination of character traits belonging to both (Warren M.A. 1982: 170).¹⁶ They didn't see androgyny as an innate quality but rather as a quality that required a conscious and courageous process: a process of

¹⁶ The second wave feminists echoed Jung's definition of androgyny as embodying "the ideal integration of masculine and feminine in the psyche of the individual [which he calls] 'wholeness' or 'individuation'" (Charlesworth, G. 1997: 186).

becoming androgynous. A rebirth into androgyny was, therefore, proposed as a way of taking advantage of both the masculine and feminine potentialities. As Berenice Andrews maintains, “in the quest for wholeness, the person becomes increasingly aware that he or she is a ‘contrasexual’ person, looking to join within him / herself the energies of both the feminine and the masculine modes of being human” (Andrews, B. 2012: 5-6).

‘Contrasexual’, in this context, is not meant as a physical state or sexual affinity but is rather a psychological state.¹⁷ However, before initiating the process of becoming androgynous, we have to agree and accept that male and female human beings are endowed with different characteristics. The association of certain characteristics to either the female or male sex is normative and makes wholeness achieved through becoming androgynous, a construct based on binary oppositions. Moreover, ‘becoming androgynous’ would limit the freedom and choice of the individual by creating a new normative stereotype.

The androgynous body in *Jelle Luipaard* (2004 – 2005) (image 7-10), may be seen as liberating human beings from sexual difference and, therefore, investing this particular body with the ability to represent the ‘universal’ human beings in their existential struggles. Indeed, androgyny in *Jelle Luipaard* is achieved through a combination of physical male (absence of breasts), and female characteristics, such as the waist - hips ratio. In fact, it would seem that in her artwork, De Bruyckere combines the apparent contradictions between the universalization of a body and the deconstruction of a particularised subject through gender neutrality, however, the more closely one thinks about this opposition, the less it seems to hold.

7.5.1 Gynandros or ‘Shared Feminine’?

The first time I saw De Bruyckere’s *Marthe* (2008) (image 7-11), exhibited in the permanent collection at the Saatchi gallery, I felt drawn towards it, not only for the uneasy feelings which the struggle between flesh and branches caused in me, but also because the artist chose to convey an ‘existential’ struggle with a female body. In the fight for survival, in which body and branches are desperately struggling for control, *Marthe* (2008), is losing control over her body and the flesh.

Marthe (2008), part-human and part tree, is a headless body in transition; a body whose internal war has become visible for all of us to see. But most importantly, ‘Marthe’ is a

¹⁷ The feminist theory of androgyny developed in literature studies in the 1960s. The aim was to discover examples of androgyny in our past. However, the term androgyny then was meant as a ‘mental’ characteristic and had no connection to the body and its shape (Starr-Bromberg P. in Kowaleski-Wallace. E. 2009: 21).

representation of a female body. The artist's decision to convey this existential struggle with a female body, sparked many considerations within me. This part of the chapter will, therefore, retrace my thoughts after seeing 'Marthe', a sculpture of a female body, which I perceived as conveying 'existential themes'. Was the feeling of a 'shared humanity' I felt for a split second just a guilty pleasure? Could this shy feeling become the everyday? Why did I find it surprising that a female body could convey a shared human predicament? Does it? Can it? Should it? Could my reading have been influenced by the rather androgynous look of 'Marthe'?



7-11: **Berlinde De Bruyckere**, *Marthe*, 2008, wax, epoxy, metal, wood and glass, 280 x 172.5 x 119.5 cm, 2008

Looking is not only a physiological activity but also profoundly influenced by our background. Knowledge and what we come to accept as 'reality', is shaped by what we are able and encouraged to see. Second wave feminists highlight the fact that looking and gender are interrelated. Griselda Pollock, for instance, acknowledges that "the construction of sexuality and its underpinning sexual difference is profoundly implicated in looking and the 'scopic field'" (Pollock, G. 1994: 11). Sexual difference, which is visible on the body, plays an important role in the way we see and position others and ourselves in society. Furthermore, visual representation within media and art practices inform the knowledge and understanding

of the body, contributing to the formation, legitimation and persistence of practices in which well-established hierarchies, power and social structures are maintained and sustained as 'natural' (Pollock, G. 1994: 9; Betterton, R. 1996: 9; Chadwick, W. in Robinson, H. 2006b: 525). Seeing is, therefore, a historical and cultural construction, which affects the formation of our identity, how we see others and how we interact with them.

Language too, plays an essential role in this 'social construction of reality', as we learn to see and interpret the world through its symbols and filters. Language is never neutral, highlighting the fact that the connection from words to our 'material reality' is constructed and ideological (Weatherall, A. 2005: 147; Bordo, S. 2003: 223). My cultural background in general and my mother tongue in particular, may in part, explain my reactions when confronted with De Bruyckere's sculpture *Marthe* (2008).¹⁸ For a fleeting moment, I saw the representation of the predicament of humanity inscribed on her metamorphosing body. This unexpected feeling of a 'shared humanity' was quickly followed by the surprise of finding 'Marthe', a female body, conveying existential suffering. Why this feeling of confusion in interpreting *Marthe*'s female body as signifying aspects of a shared humanity? Is it even possible to invest the female form with shared humanity without falling into the pit of universalistic presumptions of Western philosophy and culture?

Feminist scholars have strongly contested notions of 'universality', drawing attention to the long tradition that associates the white male body with the ability of standing in for the 'universal human being'. Establishing the notion of 'man' as 'the human' leaves no space for a positive and empowering conceptualisation of sexual difference as it supports just one type of signification. Yet the body of the white male represents just one of the many possibilities of being. The step from the male body as the model for the 'universal human', to accepting men's ways of thinking, behaving, and experiencing the world as the norm, is small. As Gatens contends, "'Man' is the model and it is his body which is taken for the human body; his reason which is taken for Reason; his morality which is formalized into a system of ethics" (Gatens, M. 1996: 84). Discourses constructed on the metaphor of the 'universal' white male body have wide ramifications in a variety of fields, not least because positioning 'man' as

¹⁸ Indeed, growing up in an Italian speaking country, I quickly learned to change register and use the masculine plural as soon as a man / boy joined the referenced group. Forcing women to constantly assume a masculine position, the Italian language lacks a more neutral word to address the concept of "humanity". The human being is indeed often translated into the term 'Man' to refer to the collective humanity, even though the 'human being' could also be translated as 'l'essere umano' or 'L'umanità' (Sabatini, A. 1993). One cannot, therefore, help, but feel the weight of these accepted ways of saying which, hidden under grammatical correctness, contribute to upholding systems supporting a patriarchal society which has always regarded women as 'other' and 'different'.

representative of the human condition or experience, will define women and their experiences as being different. Simone de Beauvoir already pointed out the fact that men just are, whereas women in a patriarchal society are ‘different’ and need special consideration (Beauvoir, S. 1997: 100-101). This mode of representation, where the male body is seen as the universal subject and the female body tends to be interpreted as a special case, supports and perpetuates duality and is a subtle and often unacknowledged form of sexism, which has widely contributed to rendering women invisible (Young, S. 2014: 21). As discussed in chapter two, it is important to emphasise the dangerous consequences of letting one class, race or gender speak for all humanity, which perpetuates the exclusions and silencing of other groups of people and their experiences. The group representing the ‘universal human being’ will take the right of writing their greatness into history and thus, perpetuating and supporting existing power structures.

Art practices have undoubtedly contributed to the legitimization and persistence of representing the white male body as the ‘universal’ human being.¹⁹ De Bruyckere, however, seems to use both male and female bodies to convey ‘universal’ existential experiences. In fact, her figures have been described as ‘universal human beings’. Juliana Engberg, ACCA artistic director, writes that “...there is universality in her headless, sexless figures....” and De Bruyckere herself describes the series ‘Schmerzemann’ as “an image of suffering man, much more universal and abstract than a portrait” (De Bruyckere, 2006). The artist refers to the universality of the human predicament by choosing an abstract and androgynous body. However, there is a marked difference in her representation of the male and female figures. Some of her male figures, as in the ‘Pietà’ (image 6-1 and 6-7), although abstract, are still marked by difference, as their genitals are clearly visible, whereas in the female figures the

¹⁹ Antony Gormley’s sculptures of male bodies, for instance, are often described as “universal figures of humanity, free from time and place” (McEvelley, T. 1993). His sculptures, because of their abstraction, are seen as “men that do not display any form of particularity. Everyone can identify with them, and they are thus associated with the idea of universality” (Brugy, E., Ecole du Louvre). The negation of a particular appearance in Gormley’s figures has been interpreted as a tool to suggest ‘universality’. Elisabeth Manchester, writing for the Tate, describes Gormley figures as “linked to processes of making and penetrating a body, but also represent functions of perception and awareness. Gormley uses his own body as the starting point to express universal human experience. For him, the body as the container or seat of consciousness becomes the means of articulating the unknowable and unseeable” (Manchester, E. 2000). However, this claim of universality, on the grounds of the abstraction is problematic. Indeed, Gormley’s sculptures are cast from the artist’s body, which is a male body. His sculptures, which seem to equate man and maleness with humanity, support and perpetuate androcentrism. Mitchell may dismiss the previous statement as “a snap judgement”, as for her Gormley’s figures, being physically /biologically males, but taking on positions culturally recognised as feminine, exemplify Butler’s distinction between gender and sex (Mitchell, W. 1995b: 6-7). In fact Mitchell states “that Gormley has a male body but uses it to express ‘feminine’ (even perhaps feminist) attitudes” (ibid: 7) However, Gormley’s figures remind the viewer of Christ’s body, a male body displaying attributes considered feminine, such as passivity and vulnerability. This connection between the male body and vulnerability / passivity, may also be interpreted as positioning Gormley’s males’ figures within the Christian tradition, in which the male body is endowed with both male and female qualities.

signs of difference have been hidden. In this aspect, De Bruyckere's figures seem to perpetuate the conventions inherited from traditional sculpture in which the realistic representation of the female pubis is considered taboo.

As discussed in chapter five, *Marthe*, a female body conveying existential issues, is the negation of the 'traditional' portrait, as the artist erases all personal and physiological details that could recreate a connection between the sculpture and the model. The figure presents different degrees of abstraction that range from the realistic and meticulously rendered legs and feet - where even bulging veins and the swelling of the muscles are visible - to the missing head. *Marthe*'s body becomes more and more abstract as our look/gaze moves up towards the head, long supposed to be the seat of subjectivity.

Moreover, according to psychoanalytical theory, *Marthe* (2008) can be seen as double lacking, as she neither possesses 'the symbol of power' –the phallus- nor does she have a voice to speak for herself. Similarly, De Bruyckere's male figures, such as *The Pietà* (image 4-7) and *Into One another* (image 4-27), even though 'the symbol of power' is clearly visible, have been 'beheaded' and therefore, castrated by a woman, the artist. The artist not only represents her male figures as vulnerable and fragile, but also takes away their power to speak for themselves. De Bruyckere's silenced, vulnerable male bodies, which refer to Christ's body can, therefore, be seen as subverting the traditional idea of man-hero; powerful and always in control of his actions and body. Representing the male body, endowed with these characteristics, which are traditionally associated with women and their bodies, questions what society defines as feminine or masculine, highlighting, in this way, how gender is socially constructed.

It could be argued that De Bruyckere, by stating that gender is irrelevant and deliberately keeping the body fragments 'gender neutral' to enhance the inclusivity of their symbolism, seems to disrupt a culturally dominant model of the male body as the standard by which the idea of the universal is formed. *Jelle Luipaard* (2004 – 2005), a male body (with an androgynous look), unsettles both masculinity and femininity, inviting spectators to accept gender ambiguity and allowing them to progress to a more multi-layered reading of the body.

Marthe's body (image 7-11), fragmented and partially abstract, may indeed point to the human predicament but also, through indexicality, refers to the body of a woman living in the present whose name is Marthe. Can then, De Bruyckere's sculpture of *Marthe* (2008), convey the concept of a contradictory and fragmentary subjectivity; a subjectivity that is always in a state of transformation - and at the same time successfully position the female body as a trope

for the suffering of both men and women? Can the plurality of women's experiences and points of view be channelled to convey 'shared human emotions'? Who is allowed to speak for humanity? Can we interpret *Marthe* as one between many possibilities to 'write women' into visibility? Could the female body of *Marthe*, function "as an axis of categorisation from which to universalize"? (Wittig, M. 2002: 61).

7.6 Multiple Normativities?

There has been extensive debate within feminist circles on the dangers and limits, but also the advantages, arising from generalisation and categorisations. On one side of the spectrum, theories informed by postmodernism categorise the many differences between women and emphasise the personal and the particular and draw attention to the danger of generalisation and categorisation. On the other side, theories shaped by sexual differences still hold on to the category 'woman', in part, through claims of shared subjectivity. Additionally, during the 1990s in France, the debate over 'parité' put the concept of 'universalism' back onto the feminist agenda (Scott Wallach, J. 2004: 65).

This last section of the chapter, will delve into the questions surrounding whether and how reading *Marthe* (2008), the representation of a specific white, female body, as a body conveying 'shared existential experiences', could contribute to the debate on the representation of the female body in contemporary art. Would *Marthe* (2008), an abstract representation of a suffering body, be read differently if the body represented was male or perceived as male?

De Bruyckere's figures are often described as sexless, as the artist remarks "my figures are very frequently creatures whose sex cannot be determined" (De Bruyckere, B. 2006). Indeed, *Marthe* (2008), is a being in a state of transformation that, because of her androgynous appearance, may disrupt the viewer's tendencies to immediately classify the body into a single and stable sexed category. Although, the title of the artwork clearly suggests a female body, *Marthe's* body, embodying many different layers of sexual identity, may be perceived as unfamiliar and ambiguous.

The contradictions within feminist debates on the possibility of forming a category 'woman', discussed in the Literature Review, hold particular relevance when examining artwork like De Bruyckere's *Marthe* (2008) (image 7-11), in which hierarchies of power inherent in both the gendered body and in the colour of the skin, come to the forefront. Indeed,

Marthe (2008), because it is a representation of a headless figure, may be considered more anonymous and, therefore, more suitable as a representation of 'human experiences'. *Marthe* (2008), although endowed with a certain anonymity, has fair skin. The figure's white skin, alongside the Christian iconographic and Greek-Ovidian references characteristic of De Bruyckere's artwork, position *Marthe* (2008), within the Western sculptural tradition of representing the suffering body as white, emaciated and male. Yet, *Marthe* is a female body, in fact: a white, emaciated female body.²⁰

Spectators could be led to presume that *Marthe*'s female body, invested with 'the right' to convey shared existential issues, does not only break with the Western artistic tradition, which positions the white male body as an emblem for all human beings, but also with the assumption that the male is the 'universal', and the female the particular. In fact, male artists were believed to address and speak for humanity, whereas female artists concentrated on the personal (Smith, S. and Watson, J. 2002: 12). Although, recent theories subscribe performativity to both men and women²¹ in the Western construction of gender difference, maleness is still often considered as not constructed and not performed, which makes it impossible for women to speak for the world.²²

Even though, according to post-modern theories, it is understood that female as well as male representations can never stand in for a 'universal' human being or human beings, often concepts such as mankind and humanity seem to still be based on the male as 'neutral', objective and universal, with the negation of the existence of a female subject. These concepts have to be reconsidered in order to provide all subjects, independently from their 'group of appurtenance', a language and a place from which to speak, think, and transcend their own specificity to their very own universal. However, it is important to highlight the difficulty in creating a language and a position for subjects, who have been an invisible part of the main discourse and do not have a past, a history, and a theoretical framework of their own (Spivak, C. G. 2010: 41-48).

²⁰ For a discussion of the branches growing out of 'Marthe's body see chapter five.

²¹ Gardiner Kegan, J. (2002). *Masculinity Studies & Feminist Theory: New directions*. New York: Columbia University Press. Dent, M. and Whitehead, S. (2002). *Managing Professional Identities: Knowledge, Performativity and the "New" Professional*. London & New York: Routledge. Kimmel, M.S. et al. (2014). *Cable Guys: Television and Masculinities in the Twenty-First Century*. New York & London: New York University Press.

²² Undeniably, my reaction upon seeing 'Marthe (2008)' for the first time, confirmed the fact that I unconsciously interpret the male body as universal and the female body as particular. Initially, I thought this was mainly due to my upbringing and mother tongue. However, discussing the matter with my eighteen-year-old daughter, whose primary language is English, I realised that the notion of the male body as universal is still present in the next generation of women. This could be taken as a sign that, although feminism has had many attainments and improved the life of many women in the West, it has not yet reached everything it had set out to do.

It is important to recognise that the androgynous look of *Marthe*'s body may play a culturally significant role in the reading of her female body as representing shared humanity. Could this imply that the interpretation of *Marthe*'s body as representing humanity is mainly due to its lack of feminine attributes and can, therefore, still be linked to the concept of 'the universal human being' as white and male?

Indeed, *Marthe*'s androgynous look points to the fact that this particular female body may still perpetuate and project the form of the white and male body as 'universal'. Claims of corporal neutrality, based on the erasure of sexual traits and voluptuousness from the female body may implicitly strengthen the position of the male body as the universal standard for representing 'humanity'. This supposedly 'universal/neutral' individual that we may want to imagine as unsexed, not-gendered and in an ideal world without race or class, therefore, fails to live up to our expectations, for this 'universal' is still male and white. This shows that this 'universalising' project in which the female body may function as a category from which to 'universalise', has not yet been reached.

Using androgyny may also be limiting in its possibilities for emancipation of the 'others'. The androgynous man in *Jelle Luippard* (2004 -2005), or *Schmerzmann* (2006), is made to look more feminine and therefore, indirectly grants subjectivity to women. The androgynous woman, as in *Marthe* (2008), is made masculine, and the femininity, which marked her for objectification is erased, redirecting or reflecting the subjective power borrowed from man. Removing sexual difference from all discourses and representations incurs, therefore, the danger of subjugating women by inclusion. The female androgynous body, as in *Marthe* (2008), devoid of sexual distinguishable traits, may be assimilated into becoming a sort of 'almost male subject'. Sexual difference, therefore, does not only dislocate the neutral and universal white and male subject inherited from the enlightenment, but will also function as the basis from which to start changing the way symbolic processes are constructed and interpreted. In fact, not only reality influences the visual, but the visual also affects the way we interpret and live in reality. To position the female body as one of the possible universals, will definitely inject a positive and productive dimension into the way the female body, with all its corporeal qualities, is perceived.

It takes a long time to change old convention, and the representation of the white male body as a universal subject seems to be particularly difficult to eradicate. Visual representations play an essential role not only in the formation of identity, but also in the way women and men position themselves in relation to their surroundings and other human beings.

Artists play an important part in identifying, questioning, and initiating changes to such well-established modes of representation. Erasing femininity, however, does little to improve and change the status quo in the male-female power dynamic. Indeed, the assumption of a plurality of meanings may find its limits in the power-relations of the time, because even if a sign can acquire several meanings, the most common meaning has a greater chance to be inscribed.

So what if, *Marthe* (2008), with her femininity intact, ‘could just be’? Could then *Marthe* (2008) be interpreted as positioning female subjectivities as representative for both male and female spectators and not as ‘the other’? The female body could be utilised in a way to achieve what Monique Wittig describes as “the axis of categorisation from which to universalize” (Wittig, M. 2002: 61).²³ The female body then will not be interpreted as a mere substitute for the white and male body, but will become one of the universal within a plurality of possibilities, leaving space for a multiplicity of discourses and different experiences among women and men.

Although every spectator will project his / her own views and experiences upon the artwork, it seems fair to argue that the knowledge acquired through a particular body, in this instance, *Marthe*’s white female body, may be transferable to other groups. The goal is to render ‘shareable’ the knowledge obtained through every body; female, male, coloured, gay, or disabled. Hence, De Bruyckere’s *Marthe* (2008), which could be considered as a particular body - of interest to just one category - is transformed into something paradigmatic of humanity. Both viewpoints, the ‘universalising’ and the ‘particularising’, are equally valid and what distinguish them are the spectators and their interests. For Nancy Hartsock, for instance, this transferable knowledge is “the basis for differing groups to understand each other and form alliances” and “reveal collective subjectivities” (Hartsocks, N. 1990: 31, 28). Although, she is careful not to deny the power of every specific situation and experience, she highlights that the knowledge acquired by a particular group may be transferable and useful to other groups, offering human beings the opportunity to still be an individual and at the same time understand others. This understanding may result in the formation of “collective subjectivities” (Hartsocks, N. 1990: 31, 28). These shared subjectivities will be different from the disembodied white, male subjectivity typical of Western thought, because they emerge

²³ For Wittig, similarly to Judith Butler, the ‘woman’ is a cultural construct. In her view there is not a ‘natural group of women’ (Wittig, M. 2002: 5). On the other side she keeps the word “women” to describe the class within they fight. This positions her within a revised humanism. Her aim is to disrupt and abolish the oppressor/oppressed dyad in order to create a new equality where all categories of others become equal (Wittig, M. 2002: 53).

from knowledge acquired by a variety of groups and can, therefore, be recognised as located and partial (ibid: 26-28).

It is worth pointing out that in some figures, such as *Jelle Luipaard* (2011 -2012) (image 6-8), the physical and existential anguish that this body is undergoing seems to take centre stage. In this representation, the entire body is presented as gender ambiguous because the giant hook hides the distinguishing marks of sexual difference. *Jelle Luipaard* (2004 - 2005), could then be positioned as a ‘queer’ body which, avoiding any signs that could be based on the ontology of sexual difference, can be seen as resisting categorisation by continuously shifting in between the ‘two genders’. In this case, the spectators may feel the need to fill in the gaps left by this absence and may project their own gender identity onto the skin of *Jelle Luipaard*. In fact, the first time I saw *Jelle Luipaard* (2004 - 2005), I read it as a female androgynous body.

In concluding this chapter, it is important to highlight that in most of her figures, such as the *Pietà* (image 4-7) and *Into-one Another to P.P.P* (image 4-23), the male body is clearly marked as male. In *Marthe* (2008), instead, the female body is presented without differentiating traits, positioning De Bruyckere’s sculptures in the conventions of the Western traditional art paradigm. In these sculptures the male body is still positioned as being a universal subject, whereas the female body is shaped as an ‘imperfect male body’. Nonetheless, De Bruyckere’s artwork does offer an important break from the Western art paradigm, because with the use of the extreme bodily fragmentation the artist proposes an important moment of ‘rupture’. This rupture or “exclamation mark” to borrow Kristeva’s expression (Kristeva, J. 1980: 142), invites the spectators to pause and contemplate presences and absences and to fill in the gaps left by the missing body parts.

Moreover, the impossibility of finding a consistent reading regarding the representation of the sexed and gendered body in De Bruyckere’s artwork can be interpreted as another point of rupture. This ambiguity of reading highlights the difficulty in positioning her figures within a feminist framework based on the ‘progress narrative’. In fact, in artworks such as *Jelle Luipaard* (2004-2005) (image 7-11), the body is presented as ‘gender neutral’, inhabiting a space in between the male and female body; femininity and masculinity. This gender ambiguity invites the spectators to project their own embodiment upon the figure, opening up the represented body to multiple and multi-layered readings. This artwork, therefore, could be situated within a feminist postmodern discourse in which gender categories become fluid, ambivalent and undetermined, and sexual difference is seen as constructed through the

repetition of performances that imitate the dominant conventions and expectation within society.

From another perspective, the female body in artwork such as *Marthe* (2008) is utilised to combine both the fluidity between the psychological inner life and the physical exteriority with ‘existential themes’. Although De Bruyckere addresses shared existential themes in most of her artworks, it is when these shared existential issues are conveyed through the female body that viewers may be confronted with even more ambiguity. Her female, fragmented and open bodies cannot be forced into a closed and chronological feminist narrative. The ambiguity in the representation of the sexed and gendered body in her artwork, highlights the contradiction of positioning the human body as conveying shared human existential issues with a particular body, as well as the difficulty of ‘contextualising’ artwork that aims to do so, within a feminist chronological or ‘progress narrative’. I have, therefore, proposed to position De Bruyckere’s artwork within a narrative that, although acknowledging the importance of feminist poststructuralist critiques of 1970’s, also makes space for a renewed interest in materiality, embodiment, affect and political activism.

In this chapter, I have discussed the possibility of conveying and decoding the pain of others. I have questioned the conception of pain as an exclusively personal and interior event, which is impossible to communicate. I have suggested that pain can be detected, which opens up the potential to recognise when others are suffering.

The wounds and the scars, in De Bruyckere’s figures, are important visual tropes used to communicate physical and psychic pain and they provide the artist with a well-established visual language with which to convey existential and emotional issues. I have highlighted how in her figures, the scar and the huge openings in the body can also signal the impossibility of healing, and therefore, ‘transcend’ their materiality in order to connect to the emotional invisible wound that cannot be healed. The wound, therefore, opens up a space for an exchange between artist, artwork and spectator, in which the spectators are called upon not only to confer meaning but also to project their own experiences, anxieties and traumas onto them.

The wounded body, in De Bruyckere’s work, can therefore, be seen as a place where meanings collide and create a plurality of interpretations. The wound, a symbol of physical and psychic pain and a symbol of Christ’s suffering on the cross, is also the symbol of womanhood and sexual difference. I have, therefore, dedicated a significant portion of this

chapter to discussing the role played by sexual differences in relation to the critical reception of her artwork, as well as how her approach to the representation of the sexed body resonates within feminist art history and theory.

I have contested the claims that describe her figures as ‘sexless’ because, although she models and transforms her figures to conform to an androgynous looking body, it is often still possible to distinguish the male from the female body. Nonetheless, the ‘inconsistencies’ regarding the reading of the sexed and gendered bodies in her artwork, mark an interesting point of debate within feminist discourses. De Bruyckere uses the androgynous looking male body to create a liminal space in which gender categories become fluid, ambivalent and undetermined. Choosing ambivalence over stability and order, the artist seems to invite the viewers to welcome a plurality of possibilities and meanings and project their own gender identity, anxiety, and fears onto the skin of the represented figure. This representation is consistent with queer theory and feminism that call for an elimination of gender difference in order to avoid the possibility of subordination and discrimination.

However, I have also shown that the same technique of erasing sexual difference to render the female body androgynous in order to convey shared human feelings, can implicitly strengthen the position of the male body, as the universal standard for representing ‘humanity’, and thus incurs the danger of subjugating women by inclusion. I have, therefore, suggested a different reading of De Bruyckere’s female figures. A reading that opens new avenues for both the female and the male viewers, not only by giving space to the specific situation and experience but also by recognising the possibility that the knowledge of a particular body or group produces is transferable and useful to other groups. This shared knowledge, which is located and partial as it emerges from knowledge acquired by a variety groups, will distinguish itself from the disembodied white, male subject, typical of Western thought. A reading which internalises a co-existence of various viewing positions and in which sexual differences function as the basis from which to start changing the way symbolic processes are constructed will not only inject a positive and productive dimension into the way the female body, with all its corporeal qualities, is perceived, but also provide human beings with a way to still be individual and at the same time understand inter-subjectivity.

De Bruyckere’s female fragmented and open bodies cannot be forced into a closed and chronological feminist narrative. The ambiguity in the representation of the sexed and gendered body in her artwork, highlights the contradiction of positioning the human body as conveying shared human existential issues with a particular body, as well as the difficulty of

‘contextualising’ artwork that aims to do so, within a chronological or ‘progress narrative’. I have, therefore, proposed to position De Bruyckere’s artwork within a feminist narrative that, although acknowledging the importance of poststructuralist critiques of 1970’s feminism, also makes space for a feminist narrative that argues for a renewed interest in materiality, embodiment, affect and political activism.

8 Conclusion

This study has positioned De Bruyckere's fragmented figures within the current concerns surrounding the im/possibility of sharing and visually representing human suffering. Focusing particularly on De Bruyckere's, I have sought to understand what kind of insight can be derived from visual representation of the fragmented body, as well as how this knowledge impacts on identity formation.

To restate the limitations of this investigation, I would like to highlight that I have consciously selected De Bruyckere's artwork representing or referring to the human body and created between 2004 and 2013. This choice has been heavily influenced by my personal interest in exploring corporal fragmentation as a tool with which to convey both personal and shared human physical and psychic pain. Concentrating on the artwork of one single Western artist, however, also raises concerns about the validity of extrapolating meaning and projecting these findings onto the contemporary Western art scene.

I also had to reflect on my own role in the debates and reproduction of images of 'the body in pain', as well as the reasons behind my interest in these representations, and how my personal concerns and beliefs impinge upon my choices. These choices clearly affect all of my claims, which have to be recognised as exploratory and situated. Personally, I read and engage with De Bruyckere's artwork from an empathetic point of view, associating myself with and projecting my experiences and fears onto the represented figures. I am, however, aware that some spectators may not be reached and touched at all by the artist's work and for some others her fragmented figures generate almost exclusively abject feelings, causing dissociation and rejection rather than an emotional association.

De Bruyckere's artwork is particularly relevant at this moment in time, not only because it addresses timeless and ever recurring themes such as loneliness, suffering, mortality and desire, but also because it emphasises the continuous repetition of suffering inflicted by human beings upon others. In fact, in her artwork human suffering can be interpreted as a recurrence of both; existential fears, due to human fragility and mortality, as well as inflicted by fellow human beings.

De Bruyckere's rather anonymous figures stand against the unmediated, explicit images of trauma and violence instantly and globally broadcasted via various media. This vast volume of brutal images has further fuelled interest in debates regarding the application and ethical

consequences of visually representing human suffering, (Di Bella M.P. and Elkin, J. 2013; Dauphinee, E. 2007; Chouliaraki, L. 2006).

Countering Lessing's argument that poetry is better suited to represent human suffering, I have shown how De Bruyckere combines several strategies to devise a visual language with which to draw attention to ever recurring themes of; suffering, loneliness, mortality, vulnerability, and desire.¹ To convey human psychic and physical suffering, the artist accesses what Aby Warburg's calls pathos or 'pathos formula', (Spivey, N. 2001: 118-119). Like the German historian, who traced the similarities between the representations of emotions in various historical periods, De Bruyckere studied Christian iconography and the visual representations of the body in pain devised by the old masters in order to learn the shared Christian subtext of human suffering.

De Bruyckere's fragmented figures function as the point of departure, as a catalyst from which to initiate the debate on the possibility of visually representing and conveying suffering through empathy and affect. Therefore, throughout this investigation, I have highlighted the dual role of De Bruyckere's representations of distorted and vulnerable bodies, in conveying both a collective and an individual experience.

Positing the possibility of an affective communication between sufferers and witnesses, accentuates the important role of art in shifting attention from the suffering of the other to a shared suffering and responsibility. This investigation, therefore, can be situated within the wider debates on the representation of corporal fragmentation in Western art that endeavours to create a shared space in which to foster a better understanding of what it may mean to suffer. Additionally, transforming suffering into tangible objects gives a different perspective and insight into the process of physical and emotional pain. De Bruyckere's distorted and fragmented figures then, may help us to realise what prevents us from recognising and acknowledging the suffering of the other. Acknowledging the difficulty of conveying pain, and that human suffering is contingent upon personal, social and cultural background, I have, nevertheless, suggested the idea that pain and suffering are not only a private and interior matter but can also be interpreted as an intersubjective phenomenon, thus potentially rendering them 'shareable'. In fact, work like De Bruyckere's figures, in which pain and suffering are made tangible through the visibly fragmented and open body, can encourage the audience to

¹ Lessing, questioning the tradition that equated poetry with the visual art, argued for the superiority of poetry as an instrument to represent the invisible, and therefore better suited to convey the dynamic of the interior life. In his view the primacy of poetical language emerged from its ability to tell a story through narrative and to create a space for the readers to project their imagination, (Murray, C. 2003: 151; Spivey, N. 2001; Allert, B. 2005: 105).

regard them as both a collective and an individual experience, unlocking the prospect of their 'shareability'.

These crumbling bodies, existing on the border between stability and dissolution, point to the unsettling process of losing control over the body, which becomes a constant reminder of our mortality. Inhabiting the space between life and death, her figures are suspended in a liminal place and occupy a space in between presence and absence, between realism and imagination, pointing to the fragility of human beings. De Bruyckere's fragmented and decaying figures draw attention to the fact that the fine line between health and deterioration does not really exist, as both states may be present simultaneously.

During the last thirty years several Western artists, alongside the 'more traditional' use of body fragmentation as traumatic and vulnerable, have increasingly utilised the body in its fragmented form as a tool with which to convey the fluidity and multiplicity of the self.² De Bruyckere's figures can be seen as paradigmatic of these changes. In fact, her interest in the human form parallels the shift in the representation of the body in the mid 1980s and early 1990s, in which artists began exploring the body, especially in its fragmented form, in order to convey the idea of a multitude of subjectivities.

Ambiguity, which is arguably considered to be the basis of depth and richness in poetry, is a chief element in De Bruyckere's three-dimensional artwork. Her distorted figures inhabit the realm of the unstable and precarious, a place in which the body is in a constant process of transformation and disintegration. In fact, she does not only construct her figures from a multitude of body fragments, but depicts the body in a state of continuous transformation, creating an ambivalent psychological space; a space in between that cannot immediately be unravelled and 'logically' understood by the audience. This ambivalent and liminal space, in which her work acquires meaning, focuses the attention upon the fragility of the boundaries between the inside and the outside, the 'Me and Not-Me'. This in-between space, created through the plurality and openness of the body fragment, allows the viewers to project their personal memories and experiences upon the represented body, blurring the boundaries between subject and object. It is especially this porousness and incompleteness of the human body in her work that draw attention to the instabilities of the boundaries in the spectators' bodies, thus influencing the constitution of their subjectivity.

² Robert Gober, Kiki Smith, Janine Antoni, Mona Hatoum, Mike Kelley, Annette Messager, David Wojnarowicz, Rona Pondick to name just a few.

The body is our own very personal ‘intimate space’ and De Bruyckere’s figures invade this space, creating a channel of communication with the spectator. Indeed, the realistic representation of the human body through colour and scale connects her figures to the viewer’s physical presence. Her death-like figures are composed of absences; heads, innards and bones are missing; but they refer to the ‘real’ body through form and the casting process. In fact, some sections of the represented body look uncannily human. This cohabiting of hyperrealism and abstraction within the same body attracts attention to the different stages of fragmentation present simultaneously in the same body, generating conflicting and abject feelings in the spectator. Ambivalence in De Bruyckere’s artwork, therefore, is further intensified by the persistence of the theme of absence within the visible, as well as the coexistence of the realistic representation of specific body parts and the abstract character of other parts within the same body.

Moreover, the joining of life-size and realistic body parts with every day materials, impacts upon the spectators’ perception and embodied knowledge, as they project their own personal bodily perspective and past experiences onto it. This personal projection becomes particularly relevant when spectators are confronted with the incomplete representations of the body, which psychically invade and attach themselves onto the viewers’ bodies and the image they have of it. The absent body part, although missing, can then be imagined. The missing body part opens a space whereupon the spectators are invited to project their own body, real or imagined. The fragmented body then, becomes a hybrid, an in-between object, formed through the combination of what is visible and what every spectator projects onto the missing fragment. The missing, but imagined body part, is then invested with a powerful psychological form of presence, opening up the possibility of rendering the invisible emotional suffering ‘tangible’ via the visible body.

Suffering, however, is often considered an experience that isolates and silences subjects, depriving them of the ability to communicate. To uphold the view that pain cannot be imagined, does not necessarily imply its complete non-accessibility, (Scarry, E. 1987, Sontag S. 2003). Indeed, recent neurological studies that support a convergence of bodily experiences through the senses, give scientific credibility to visual and media studies postulating that embodiment and empathy come together in the perception of artifacts (Schott, G. D. 2015; Freedberg, D. and Gallese, V. 2007; Shaw, DJ. and Czekoova, K. 2013). This of course, reactivates the debates regarding the im/possibility of understanding ‘the pain of others’, and those concerning the representability of emotions in general and suffering in particular.

Recognising the potential of affective communication between the sufferer and the witness does not necessarily imply denial that pain and suffering is felt differently depending on personal, social and cultural background. Her artwork can be seen, as an invitation to the viewer to consider the possibility that pain and suffering are not necessarily a private and interior matter, but can also be an intersubjective phenomenon. Indeed, when the inside of the body is exposed and displayed for everybody to see, as in many of her figures, the vulnerability and mortality of the physical body becomes ‘tangible’, and existential suffering may take on a material form, becoming more ‘shareable’ through an already well known visual vocabulary. This affective communication between bodies is of paramount importance in attesting the role of visual representation in shifting attention from the ‘pain of the other’ to a shared suffering and shared responsibility.

The belief in the inaccessibility and ‘unshareability’ of another's pain may raise questions about the responsibilities and responses of the one witnessing the suffering of another fellow human being. There is, in fact, a correlation between the inability to imagine the pain of the other and the facility with which we can injure that other, (Scarry, E. 1996: 98-100). The ability and propensity to injure other people increases the further away from ourselves we perceive them. Artwork drawing attention to the similarities between bodies, therefore, will not allow us to imagine the other as distant and different. We may not know what a spectator confronted with De Bruyckere's figures feels, however, we can understand the way through which these feelings are conveyed. In fact, her representations of fragmented and vulnerable bodies, utilise well-established codes, in which pain is undeniably present, to visually convey feelings of physical and psychic pain. Politically and ethically suggesting that pain is not an invisible and exclusively interior event, but one that we can recognise when the bodies of others are in pain, will make the absent response more difficult to rationalise, and thus responsibility will have to be reconsidered.

De Bruyckere combines various references, forms and materials with a variety of visual and sensory elements in order to convey, even though imperfectly, the anguish of the suffering body. De Bruyckere's artwork is grounded in the embodied connection between art object, body and senses. Her representations of fragmented human bodies heighten intra-subjective awareness through affective knowledge. Although affect, the energy of the in-between, may be felt immediately, its meaning often escapes ‘signification’, (Marks, L. and Sobchack, V). This immediate energy of the in-between, accentuates the relationship between presence and absence and between inside and outside.

Acknowledging the importance of all the senses in the perception of De Bruyckere's works of art, places similar emphasis on both, the shared and the personal knowledge. In fact, an artwork that engages the viewer through immediate affective sensations may activate, as Tomkins would put it, the "primary motivational system", shared by many, (Tomkins, S. 2009: 164, 168). The possibility of conveying emotions through the body provides spectators with the opportunity to inhabit a communal empathic space in which experiences and emotions can be shared, despite the fact that the viewer may have a different cultural background and that there will always be parts of the artwork that are individual and difficult to communicate.

Positioning pain and suffering as partially 'shareable' through empathy and affect, however, questions the postmodern anti-essentialist and anti-humanist attitude. In fact, utilising the cast of a specific body to visually represent a shared human condition raises several questions. For instance, the body in De Bruyckere's figures is presented as open and as a site of multiple meanings, inhabiting a liminal space, not only through materiality and form, but also by undoing sex and gender boundaries. The ambiguity in the representation and reading of the sexed body in her artwork, illustrates the inherent incongruity of conveying shared existential issues within a particular and sexed body.

While De Bruyckere's artwork can be considered, for the most part, decidedly postmodern, at times it occupies an unresolved position between modernism and postmodernism. In key aspects of her art practice she adheres to postmodern concepts. In fact, her fragmented bodies draw attention to the fact that our subjectivity is constructed as fluid and multiple, pointing to the impossibility of a unified subjectivity. Her figures also disrupt the boundaries between human and material, merging the figures with fabric and cushions or between human and animal, further questioning the concept of unified subjectivity. De Bruyckere has also widely adopted the postmodern tendencies to combine historical, literary, and mythological and art historical citations. The convergence of more than one 'discourse' into her artwork also draws attention to the plurality and 'openness' of knowledge and meaning, drawing attention to the role and the choices presented to the spectator in determining the meaning of the art piece. The sex and gender of several of her sculptures is presented as fluid and ambiguous. The artist, however, addresses existential themes and represents human emotions with a particular body. Hence, De Bruyckere's figures, while in many aspects can be aligned to postmodernism, retain an adherence to particular modernist

viewpoints. One could, however, argue that De Bruyckere, in true postmodern style, does not embrace every aspect of postmodernism but selects from some of its core ideas.

Connecting De Bruyckere's figures with the politics of pain and suffering in the contemporary context of war, terror and torture, draws attention to the political and ethical implications of such artwork. War and what human beings are able to inflict upon each other is a central theme in her artwork. In fact, as I discuss in chapter three, four and five, some of her artworks have been inspired by the images of the recent wars and genocides broadcasted or published in the media. Visually, her sculptures of fractured and open bodies recall the victims of war and torture. Through her layered references, she not only creates a connection between historical and contemporary atrocities, but she also shows that although place and motives of violence may change, the consequences and human suffering caused by the violence, remain the same. In fact, an event not only becomes traumatic because it happened, but it is also the possibility of its repetition that keeps haunting the psyche.

The artist's frequent references to the crucifixion, not only point to the suffering of Christ, but also make the viewer aware of the shared responsibility in Christ's death. Referring to the Passion and to the injustice Christ was subjected to, therefore, can also be seen as a comment on the persistence injustices perpetuated all over the world. The connection to Christ's crucifixion becomes an emblematic symbol of the unjust and indiscriminate suffering, and is used to awaken feelings of guilt in the spectator. Through this layered system of references, the artist builds a bridge between past and present, inviting spectators to ponder the continuous perpetuation of violence against fellow human beings. The focus then shifts from the particular event to the continuous repetition of violence. Human beings seem to be caught in a loop of violence and conflict that, similar to traumatic events, is continuously repeated. However, we are not aware of this need to compulsively replicate violence and we ascribe the reasons of conflicts to historical and political incidents.

In her interviews, the artist has often mentioned wars such as the Rwandan genocide or the plight of refugees, as inspirations for her artwork. These events, however, are never directly reproduced in the artwork. Her figures, being culturally non-specific or time-bound, inhabit the past, the present and the future. Although, De Bruyckere's artwork reproduces realistically some parts of the human body, the visibility and roughness of the seams give prominence to the marks of their production. Her figures, clearly presented as wo/man made objects, are not directly connected to a specific act of violence. It is in this disassociation from reality, from the real event and from the real hurt body, that the potential for a better understanding about

pain and suffering resides. In fact, these fragmented figures, because they are clearly recognised as representations, can serve to initiate debates about pain and suffering beyond 'the artistic field', without the danger of becoming entangled in the politics of a specific event or conflict. Indeed, in contrast to the fetishized images of 'the body in pain' continuously broadcasted in the media, in which the suffering body becomes the symbol of the violence and inhumanity of the other in order to support the political and military agenda of a government, De Bruyckere's artwork does not point to a particular conflict. The art historical references spanning centuries, the anonymity of the represented bodies, and the non-specificity of location, time and conflict, combine to highlight the horrendous consequences of war and torture without exploiting the images of particular suffering human beings. In the media, however, images of people in pain become anonymous symbols of their plight, dehumanising and depriving them of their own personal pain in the attempt to represent pain itself. This type of representation depersonalises their suffering, depriving them of the specificity of their interior experience, (Sliwinski, S. 2004: 153; Scarry, E. 1987: 98). Therefore, the inability of connecting her work either temporarily, geographically or historically to a particular event, does not allow the viewers to believe in their own innocence. Not knowing who inflicted the pain introduces another level of uncertainty to the artwork, questioning the role of the spectators and suggesting their possible appurtenances to the collectivity of perpetrators and in doing so, pointing out our collective contribution and responsibility to the suffering we are witnessing.

De Bruyckere's sculptures draw attention to the similarities of suffering bodies in order to emphasise what is shared through time and between human beings without simplifying suffering into easy commodification. The artist, avoiding the direct use of particular contemporary violent events, does not participate in the public and repeated 'exhibition' of the victims. The headless and tortured bodies in her sculptures, stripped of their subjectivity, convey the material reality of bodies in pain, without allowing a clear recognition of the 'other in pain' and, therefore, disrupting the separation between the 'Me and the Not-Me', between the painful and the pain free. The disruption of boundaries between the body suffering, the one witnessing it and the one inflicting the pain, reinforces the ambiguity fashioned through form, techniques and materiality. Spectators are then made aware of the interchangeability between the position of victim and offender, enabling the consideration that every-body can assume any of the roles described above. The disruption of the dyad Me/Not-Me, denies the possibility of non-responsibility and indifference to the bystander, drawing attention to the fact that

believing in the impossibility of understanding ‘the pain of other’, can become a way of avoiding responsibility.

The existence of a shared emphatic space, where suffering of the other can be recognised, is supported by recent neuro-scientific discoveries, such as the ‘mirror neuron’ and the ‘alternative neural networks’ models.³ Thus, I think that the neurological studies discussed above and in the literature review, will play an essential role in future debates surrounding the im/possibility of understanding and sharing the suffering of others. It is, therefore important for future research to promoting a closer collaboration between the arts and neuroscience in order to develop a view that makes space for shared experiences, supported by cognitive ‘universals’ and cultural specificity. This interdisciplinary approach could widen the role played by art in other fields, as the visual vocabulary created by artists may be used to enhance the communication between human beings.

³ The mirror neurons model describes the physical process the spectators experience when watching somebody suffering. The alternative neural networks model explains how empathy is evoked through a complex convergence of knowledge and well-known visual clues, (Schott, G. D. 2015; Freedberg, D. and Gallese, V. 2007; Shaw, DJ. and Czekoova, K. 2013).

Appendix

Berlinde De Bruyckere: Solo and Group Exhibitions¹

Born in Ghent, Belgium, 1964 Lives and works in Ghent, Belgium

Solo Exhibitions

2016

National Gallery of Iceland, 'Berlinde De Bruyckere', Reykjavik, Iceland Leopold Museum, 'Berlinde De Bruyckere. Suture', Vienna, Austria Hauser & Wirth, 'Berlinde De Bruyckere. No Life Lost', New York NY

2015

Musée d'Art Moderne et Contemporain, 'Berlinde De Bruyckere. Penthesilea', Strasbourg, France

Kunsthhaus Bregenz, 'Berlinde De Bruyckere. The Embalmer', Bregenz, Austria
Kunstraum Dornbirn, 'Berlinde De Bruyckere. The Embalmer', Dornbirn, Austria
Gemeentemuseum Den Haag, 'Berlinde De Bruyckere', The Hague, Netherlands

2014

Hauser & Wirth, 'Berlinde De Bruyckere', London, England
S.M.A.K., 'Berlinde De Bruyckere. Sculptures & Drawings 2000-2014', Ghent, Belgium
La Maison Rouge - Fondation Antoine de Galbert, 'Philippe Vandenberg & Berlinde De Bruyckere. Il me faut tout oublier', Paris, France

2013

55th Biennale di Venezia, Belgian Pavilion, 'Berlinde De Bruyckere. Kreupelhout - Cripplewood', Venice, Italy
Kunsthhaus Graz, 'Berlinde De Bruyckere. In the Flesh', Graz, Austria

2012

Galleria Continua, 'Berlinde De Bruyckere', Beijing, China
Hauser & Wirth, 'Berlinde De Bruyckere. Three Sculptures', Zurich, Switzerland
Southwood Garden, St James's Church, 'Hauser & Wirth Outdoor Sculpture: Berlinde De Bruyckere', London, England
De Pont Museum of Contemporary Art, 'Philippe Vandenberg & Berlinde De Bruyckere. Innocence is precisely: never to avoid the worst', Tilburg, Netherlands
Arter, 'Berlinde De Bruyckere. Yara - The Wound', Istanbul, Turkey ACCA (Australian Centre for Contemporary Arts), 'Berlinde De Bruyckere. We are all Flesh', Melbourne, Australia

2011

Kunstmuseum Bern, 'Mysterium Leib. Berlinde De Bruyckere im Dialog mit Cranach und Pasolini', Bern, Switzerland (Travelling Exhibition) DHC/ART Foundation für Contemporary

¹ Hauser & Wirth (2016). Biography, Berlinde de Bruyckere. Available from <http://www.hauserwirth.com/artists/6/berlinde-de-bruyckere/biography/> [Accessed 30 november 2016].

Art, 'Berlinde De Bruyckere', Montreal, Canada

Kunstmuseum Moritzburg, 'Mysterium Leib. Berlinde De Bruyckere im Dialog mit Cranach und Pasolini', Halle, Germany (Travelling Exhibition) Hauser & Wirth, 'Berlinde De Bruyckere. Into One-Another. To P.P.P.', New York NY

2010

Galleria Continua, Le Moulin, 'Une escapade d'art contemporain en Seine-et-Marne', Boissy-le-Chatel, France

Le Moulin, Galleria Continua, 'In-finitum', Paris, France

Hauser & Wirth Zürich, 'Berlinde De Bruyckere', Zurich, Switzerland Galleria Continua, 'Berlinde De Bruyckere - Elie', San Gimignano, Italy Librairie St. Hubert, 'Portfolio: afb. L'Image', Brussels, Belgium

2009

Spedale di Santa Fina, 'Berlinde De Bruyckere in dialogue with Benedetto da Maiano (1442-1497)', San Gimignano, Italy

Hauser & Wirth Colnaghi, 'Berlinde De Bruyckere - Luca Giordano. We Are All Flesh', London, England

2008

Espace Claude Berri, 'Berlinde De Bruyckere', Paris, France Gallery Yvon Lambert, 'Berlinde De Bruyckere', New York NY

2007

Galleria Continua, 'Berlinde De Bruyckere', San Gimignano, Italy Museum Moderner Kunst Kärnten, 'Berlinde De Bruyckere - Der Schmerzensmann', Klagenfurt, Austria

Kunstmuseum Luzern, 'Berlinde De Bruyckere', Lucerne, Switzerland Royal Academy of Fine Arts, 'Berlinde De Bruyckere. Schmerzensmann V', Ghent, Belgium

2006

Hauser & Wirth London, 'Schmerzensmann', London, England Kunsthalle Düsseldorf, 'Under Cover - aus dem Verborgenen. Berlinde De Bruyckere and Martin Honert', Düsseldorf, Germany

2005

La Maison Rouge, Fondation Antoine de Galbert, 'Berlinde De Bruyckere. Eén', Paris, France De Pont Foundation for Contemporary Art, 'Eén', Tilburg, Netherlands

2004

Hauser & Wirth Zürich, 'Berlinde De Bruyckere', Zurich, Switzerland

2003

Galleria Continua, 'Berlinde De Bruyckere', San Gimignano, Italy Maison Rouge, 'Berlinde De Bruyckere', Paris, France

2002

Galerie CD Christine De Ketelaere, 'Berlinde De Bruyckere', Tiel, Belgium

Caermersklooster - Provinciaal Centrum voor Kunst en Cultuur, 'Berlinde De Bruyckere', Ghent, Belgium

2001

Galleria Continua, 'Berlinde De Bruyckere', San Gimignano, Italy
 Köln Skulptur- Art Cologne, 'Berlinde De Bruyckere', Cologne, Germany Museum van Hedendaagse Kunst Antwerpen, 'en alles is aanéén- genaaid', Antwerp, Belgium
 Maison de quartier de Rosendael Centre, 'C. Reybroeck, 1997', Dunkerque, France
 de Brakke Grond, 'Aanéén-gegroeid', Amsterdam, Netherlands

2000

Park ter Beuken, 'POTEN, poten zullen bomen worden', Lokeren, Belgium
 In Flanders Fields Museum, 'In Flanders Fields', Leper, Belgium
 De Pont Foundation for Contemporary Art, 'Aanéén-genaaid', Tilburg, Netherlands

1998

Campo-Santo, 'Tweeluik 98', Ghent, Belgium / Sint-Amandsberg, Belgium

1997

Kunstvereniging Diepenheim, 'De Slaapzaal', Diepenheim, Netherlands

1996

Vrienden van het PMMK, 'Tekeningen 1995-96', Oostende, Belgium

1995

Sint-Lucaspassage, 'Berlinde De Bruyckere', Antwerp, Belgium Openluchtmuseum voor Beeldhouwkunst Middelheim, 'Onschuld kan een hel zijn', Antwerp, Belgium
 Das Belgische Haus, 'Dialo(o)g II (with Federico Fusi)', Keulen, Germany The Corcoran Gallery of Art, 'Washington Velvets (two from Flanders)', Washington DC

1994

Galerie Brinkman, 'Berlinde De Bruyckere', Amsterdam, Netherlands

1993

Galerie Joost Declercq, 'Huis', Ghent, Belgium
 Gemeentelijke tentoonstellingsruimte van Kasteel Blauwendael, 'Berlinde De Bruyckere', Waasmunster, Belgium

1991

Galerie van de Academie, Kasteel Blauwendael, 'Berlinde De Bruyckere', Waasmunster, Belgium

1990

Museo Dhondt-Dhaenens, 'Reflecting on Confinement and death', Deurle, Belgium
 Galerie S. & H. de Buck, Ghent, Belgium

1988

Galerie Fred Lanzenberg, 'Berlinde De Bruyckere', Brussels, Belgium

Group Exhibitions

2016

MONA Museum of Old and New Art, 'On the Origin of Art', Hobart, Australia
 Marta Herford, 'Die innere Haut - Kunst und Scham', Herford, Germany Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna, 'Time is out if Joint', Rome, Italy Marian Goodman Gallery, 'Animality', London, England
 Museo de Bellas Artes de Bilbao, 'Escultura hiperrealista 1973-2016', Bilbao, Spain (Travelling Exhibition)
 Kunstmuseum Bern, 'What Remains. The World of Cesare Lucchini', Bern, Switzerland
 Nationalgalerie im Hamburger Bahnhof - Museum für Gegenwart, 'Capital: Debt - Territory - Utopia', Berlin, Germany
 San Antonio Museum of Art, 'In the Dust of this Planet', San Antonio TX EMMA - Espoo Museum of Modern Art, 'Search of the Present', Espoo, Finland
 York Art Gallery, 'Flesh: Skin & Surface exhibition', York, England Lehmbruck Museum, 'On Surface. An der Oberfläche. The Surface as Carrier of Meaning in 21st Century Sculpture', Duisburg, Germany Pinchuk Art Centre, 'Loss, in memory of Babi Yar', Kiew, Ukraine

2015

Rommelaerecomplex, 'Post Mortem', Ghent, Belgium
 Galerie Daniel Templon, 'La Belgique', Paris, France
 K21 - Ständehaus, Stiftung Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, 'The Problem of God', Dusseldorf, Germany
 Museu de Arte Moderna, 'The Importance of Being...', Rio de Janeiro, Brazil (Travelling Exhibition)
 Zentrum Paul Klee, 'About Trees', Berne, Switzerland
 Galleria Continua, Le Centquatre Paris 'Follia Continua: Les 25 ans de Galleria Continua', Paris, France
 Galerie Rudolfinum, 'Flaesh', Prague, Czech Republic
 Museum Beelden aan Zee, 'Vormidable. Contemporary Flemish Sculpture', The Hague, Netherlands
 Galerie Laurent Godin, 'Substance', Paris, France
 TextielMuseum, 'Under the Skin', Tilburg, Netherlands
 Museum Dr. Guislain, 'Schaamte/Honte', Ghent Belgium
 Museo de Arte Contemporáneo, 'The Importance of Being...', Buenos Aires, Argentina (Travelling Exhibition)
 Palazzo Fortuny, 'Proportio', Venice, Italy
 MACRO - Museo d'arte contemporanea Roma, 'I Belgi. Barbari e Poeti', Rome, Italy
 Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, 'The Importance of Being...', Havana, Cuba (Travelling Exhibition)

2014

MART Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art of Trento and Rovereto, 'The war which is coming is not the first one. Great War 1914 - 2014', Rovereto, Italy
 Nevada Museum of Art, 'Late Harvest', Las Vegas NV
 Collection Lambert en Avignon, 'La disparition des lucioles', Avignon, France
 Kulturhuset, 'Barockt', Stockholm, Sweden
 Kunstammer Rau. Arp Museum Bahnhof Rolandseck, 'Leibhaftig. Der menschliche Körper

zwischen Lust und Schmerz', Remagen, Germany Fondazione Sandretto Re Rebaudengo, 'Something Old, Something New, Something Borrowed, Something Blue', Torino, Italy
 Tripostal, 'Passion Secrètes', Rijsel, France
 MAMCO, 'Trop Humain', Genève, Switzerland
 Frankfurter Kunstverein, 'Death is your body', Frankfurt, Germany Kunstvereniging
 Diepenheim, 'Het landschap en de romantische verleiding', Diepenheim, Netherlands

2013

La Maison Rouge - Fondation Antoine de Galbert, 'Théâtre du monde', Paris, France
 Hamburger Bahnhof, 'Body Pressure. Sculpture since the 1960s', Berlin, Germany
 Gemeentemuseum Den Haag, 'De Anatomische Les', The Hague, Netherlands
 Le Palais des Papes and Collection Lambert en Avignon, 'Les Papesses. Louise Bourgeois, Camille Claudel, Berlinde De Bruyckere, Kiki Smith, Jana Sterbak', Avignon, France
 'Kunstenfestival Watou 2013', Watou, Belgium
 Centrale, 'Bazaar Belgique', Brussels, Belgium

2012

ME Collectors Room, 'Through the Looking Glass', Berlin, Germany Monastery of Bornem, 'De Nieuwe Gouden Eeuw - The New Golden Age', Bornem, Belgium
 Lokermise, 'Human Capsules. Eight Female Artists from the Ursula Hauser Collection', St.Gallen, Switzerland
 St. Bavo Cathedrale, 'Sint Jan', Ghent, Belgium

2011

La Maison Rouge, 'Memories of the Future, The Olbricht Collection', Paris, France
 Deichtorhallen Hamburg, 'Zwei Sammler. Thomas Olbricht und Harald Falckenberg', Hamburg, Germany
 Musée des Beaux-Arts de Lyon, 'Collection Antoine de Galbert', Lyons, France
 Palazzo Fortuny, 'Tra. Edge of Becoming', Venice, Italy
 Saatchi Gallery, 'Shape of Things to Come', London, England
 Bozar, 'Venetian and Flemish Masters', Brussels, Belgium
 Andrea Rosen Gallery, 'Flemish Masters, That's Life', New York NY

2010

Uffizi Gallery, 'Autoritratte. Artiste di capriccioso e destrissimo ingegno ritratte per gli Uffizi', Florence, Italy
 Museion Bolzano, 'Che cosa sono le nuvole? Artworks from the Enea Righi Collection', Bolzano, Italy
 Kunstmuseum Luzern, 'Reference and Affinity', Lucerne, Switzerland Barbican Art Gallery, 'The Surreal House', London, England
 Museo di Arte Moderna e Contemporanea di Trento e Rovereto, 'Languages and Experimentations. Young artists in a contemporary collection', Rovereto, Italy
 Gwangju Biennale Hall, 'Gwangju Biennale 2010', Gwangju, Korea Middelheimmuseum, 'Nieuwe monumenten', Antwerp, Belgium
 Project Space 1646, 'Ghosts', The Hague, Netherlands
 Barbican Art Gallery, 'Surreal House', London, England
 Kulturzentrum bei den Minoriten, 'Prometheus', Graz, Austria Vancouver Art Gallery, 'Visceral Bodies', Vancouver, Canada
 Aspen Art Museum, 'Disembodied', Aspen CO

2009

Beurs van Beurlage, 'Niet Normaal: Difference on Display', Amsterdam, Netherlands
 Centre Georges Pompidou, 'Le sort probable de l'homme qui avait avalé le fantôme', Paris, France
 Les Jacobins, 'Là où je vais, je suis déjà. Le Printemps de Septembre à Toulouse', Toulouse, France
 '3rd Moscow Biennale of Contemporary Art', Moscow, Russia Kunstmuseum Luzern, 'Silence, A Selection of Works from the Collection', Lucerne, Switzerland
 La Calmeleterie (private residence), 'A house is not a home', Nazelles- Négron, France
 Palazzo Fortuny, 'Infinitum', Venice, Italy
 Compton Verney, 'Fatal Attraction: Diana and Actaeon - The forbidden Gaze', Warwickshire, England (travelling exhibition)
 The Parrish Art Museum, 'Damaged Romanticism: A Mirror of Modern Emotion', Southampton NY (Travelling Exhibition)

2008

Maison de Victor Hugo, 'Les Misérables, un roman inconnu', Paris, France
 Broelmuseum Kortrijk - Museum voor beeldende en toegepaste kunst, 'FuturARTextiel', Kortrijk, Belgium
 Kunsthau Graz, 'Leben? Biomorphe Formen in der Skulptur', Graz, Austria
 Stiftung Museum Kunst Palast, 'Diana und Aktaion. Der verbotene Blick auf die Nacktheit', Dusseldorf, Germany (Travelling Exhibition)
 Chapelle de l'Ecole Nationale des Beaux-Arts, 'Academia', Paris, France Yvon Lambert, 'The Stranger', New York NY
 New Museum, 'After Nature', New York NY
 Blaffer Gallery, University of Houston, 'Damaged Romanticism: A Mirror of Modern Emotion', Houston TX (Travelling Exhibition)
 Villa Manin Centre for Contemporary Art, 'God and Goods', Udine, Italy Galerie Geukens & De Vil, 'Resolution 1325', Antwerp, Belgium
 MARTa Herford, 'Die Hände der Kunst', Herford, Germany
 Museum Küppersmühle für Moderne Kunst, 'Der Eigene Weg. Perspektiven belgischer Kunst', Duisburg, Germany
 Lokaal 01, 'Aerials of sublime transscapes', Breda, Netherlands
 Kasteel van Gaasbeek 'Actuele kunst in het', Gaasbeek, Belgium Hudson Valley Center for Contemporary Art, 'Origins', New York NY RAM, 'Kaleidoscope II', Rotterdam, Netherlands
 S.M.A.K. - Stedelijk Museum voor Actuele Kunst, 'The Hands of Art', Ghent, Belgium
 Centre d'Art la Panera, 'Beautiful People', Lerida, Spain (Travelling Exhibition)

2007

Moussem Festival, 'ZONDER TITEL', Antwerp, Belgium
 Galleria Continua / Le Moulin, Le Moulin, Paris, France
 The Zabłudowicz Collection, 'An Archaeology', London, England
 Fries Museum, 'Beautiful People', Leeuwarden, Netherlands (Travelling Exhibition)
 Crac Alsace, 'Beautiful People', Altkirch, France (Travelling Exhibition) Kunstmuseum Luzern, 'Berlinde De Bruyckere, Jenny Saville, Dan Flavin', Lucerne, Switzerland
 Begijnhofkerk & CC de Bogaard, 'Should clouds be wasted and little fish - Berlinde De Bruyckere, Marilou van Lierop, Carla Zaccagnini', Sint- Truiden, Belgium
 Palazzo Fortuny, 'Artempo - Where Time Becomes Art' (part of the 52nd Biennale di Venezia, 'LII Esposizione Internazionale d'Arte 1997'), Venice, Italy

Museum Moderner Kunst Kärnten, 'Donald Baechler, Berlinde De Bruyckere', Klagenfurt, Austria

10. Triennale Kleinplastik Fellbach, 'Bodycheck', Fellbach, Germany Hauser & Wirth Colnaghi, 'Old School', London, England (Travelling Exhibition)

Zwirner & Wirth New York, 'Old School', New York NY (Travelling Exhibition)

Nationalgalerie im Hamburger Bahnhof, Museum für Gegenwart, 'Schmerz/ Pain', Berlin, Germany

Triennale Bovisa, 'Timer 01, Intimità/Intimacy', Milan, Italy

Art Basel 2007, Basel, Switzerland

De Kunstkas, 'Vit (A)rti', Kemzeke, Belgium

Kasteel het Nijenhuis (Museum De Fundatie), 'Shelter', Heino/Wijhe, Netherlands

Roger Raveelmuseum, 'Waterverf', Machelen-Zulte, Belgium Museum Minderbroeders,

'Passie voor het ongrijpbare', Sint-Truiden, Belgium

2006

Museo d'Arte Moderna, 'Chère Louise: in onore di Louise Bourgeois per il suoi 95 anni', Ascona, Switzerland

MOB - Museum of Glass, 'Context Series, Part I. Fresh!', Tacoma WA Kunsthalle Göppingen, 'Vom Pferd erzählen', Gottingen, Germany

4th Berlin biennial for contemporary art, 'Von Mäusen und Menschen', Berlin, Germany

Museum Voor Schone Kunst, 'Ademen en Verstikken', Antwerp, Belgium KIASMA -

Museum of Contemporary Art, 'ARS 06', Helsinki, Finland Hudson Valley Center for Contemporary Art, 'Figure it out', Peekskill NY Le Quartier centre d'art contemporain de

Quimper, 'Corps étranger', Quimper, France

Cultureel Centrum, 'BeTEKEN II', Hasselt, Belgium

La Centrale Electrique, 'Zoo-', Brussels, Belgium

2005

Museum Dr. Guislain, 'Pijn', Ghent, Belgium

Musée des Beaux-Arts, 'La Peau est ce qu'il y a de plus profond', Valenciennes, France

De Noker, 'Emilie Fresco', Mechelen, Belgium

Galleria d'Arte Moderna, 'War is over', Bergamo, Italy

Fondazione Sandretto Re Rebaudengo, 'Bidibidibidiboo. La Collezione Sandretto Re

Rebaudengo per i dieci anni della Fondazione', Turin, Italy Galleria Continua, 'The New Space in Beijing', Beijing, China

The Hudson Valley Center for Contemporary Art, 'Figure It Out: New Directions in Figurative Sculpture', Peekskill NY

DA2 Domus Artium, 'Baroque and Neobaroque. The Hell of the Beautiful', Salamanca, Spain

PMMK - Provinciaal Museum voor Moderne Kunst, 'Soul', Oostende, Belgium

Museum Kunst Palast, 'SLOW ART, Contemporary Art from the Netherlands and Flanders', Dusseldorf, Germany

Fondacio Espais d'Art Contemporani, 'La Dona Arbore', Girona, Spain ____, 'Origin 2005', Bruges, Belgium

Institute of Contemporary Art, 'Springtide', Philadelphia PA

Palais de Beaux Arts, 'Visionary Belgium', Brussels, Belgium

Assembly Projects, Bath, England

Watou Poeziezomer, 'Nous le Passage', Watou, Belgium

ARCO 'Contemporary Art Fair 05', Madrid, Spain

Modern Chinese Art Foundation, 'Werken uit de Collectie & Peter Buggenhout - Berlinde De

Bruyckere', Ghent, Belgium

2004

Oberösterreichische Landesgalerie, 'Flexible 4 (identities)', Linz, Austria (Travelling Exhibition)

Galleria Continua, 'De Humana Proportione', San Gimignano, Italy

____, 'Watou 2004', Watou, Belgium

Fondazione Sandretto Re Rebaudengo, 'Non Toccare la Donna Bianca', Turin, Italy

MAN - Museum d'Arte Povincia di Nuoro, 'Catastrofi Minime', Nuoro, Italy

IKOB - Internationales Kunstzentrum Ostbelgien, 'Vanitas. Eitelkeit van de ijdelheden', Eupen, Belgium

Sint-Blasius Hospital, 'Solo Quint II', Dendermode, Belgium

Haunch of Venison, 'Animals', London, England

2003

The Whitworth Art Gallery, 'Flexible 4 (identities)', Manchester, England (Travelling Exhibition)

Museum voor Schone Kunsten, 'Maria Magdalena', Ghent, Belgium

De Schrijnwerkerij, 'Methamorphosis', Geel, Belgium

Art Athena, 'The Ambiguity of the Image. Belgian Art Now', Athens

vzw Ku(n)st*, PMMK - Provincial Museum for Modern Art, 'Beaufort 03, Art by the Sea', De Haan, Oostende, Belgium

Echigo-Tsumari Triennale, Niigata, Japan

La Biennale di Venezia, 'L Espositione Internationale d'Arte 2003' (Italian Pavilion), Venice, Italy

Den Haag Sculptuur, 'Modelvrouwen / Role Models', The Hague, Netherlands

Museum of Contemporary Art, 'Europe Exists', Tessalonica, Greece Watou Poeziezomer, 'Opzij van het kijken', Watou, Belgium

C.C. Hasselt, 'Sacrale Kunst van onze Tijd', Hasselt, Belgium

S.M.A.K. - Stedelijk Museum voor Actuele Kunst, 'Gelijk het leven is', Ghent, Belgium

Museum het Domein, 'Models and Mavericks', Sittard, Netherlands Rosbeiaardzaal - Stadhuis Grote Markt, 'Documentatietentoonstelling', Dendermonde, Belgium

Galleria Continua, 'Disegnando', San Gimignano, Italy

2002

CIAP actuele kunst, 'Hedendaagse kunst in Limburgse verzamelingen', Hasselt, Belgium

L.A.C. - Lieu d'Art Contemporain, 'Methamorphosis', Sigeon, France Museo Abello, 'Methamorphosis', Barcelona, Spain

Art Agents Gallery, 'Human-ism I', Hamburg, Germany

Orion Art Gallery, 'Human-ism II', Oostende, Belgium Caemersklooster, 'Zinnebeeldig, 7 symoblen in cultureel erfgoed en hedendaagse kunst: een confrontatie', Ghent, Belgium

The Drawing Center, '25th Anniversary Benefit Selections Exhibition Lottery', New York NY

Cultureel Centrum Maasmechelen, 'Eva Venus Madonna. Beelden van vrouwelijkheid', Maasmechelen, Belgium

2001

Cultureel Centrum De Velinx, 'Kunst tegen Onrecht', Tongeren, Belgium Broelmuseum, Kapel Groeningeabdij, BBI, 'De spiegel van het verlangen', Kortrijk, Belgium

Kasteel, 'Secret Gardens', Rekem, Belgium

Van Disselhuis, 'Y.E.L.L.O.W., Actuel Kunst en Psychiatrie', Geel, Belgium

Kunsthall Sint Pietersabdij, 'Vrouwenzaken/zakenvrouwen', Ghent, Belgium
 De Beyer, 'Mukha te gast, Germany keuze van Florent Bex', Breda, Netherlands
 Galerie De Lege Ruimte, 'De Lege Ruimte/Blinde Vlek', Ghent, Belgium Provinciale Centrum
 voor Beeldende Kunst- Begijnhof, 'Het versluierd beeld', Hasselt, Belgium
 Various locations, 'Sonsbeek 9: Locus/Focus', Arnhem, Netherlands Academia Belgica,
 'Metamorphosis', Rome, Italy
 RAM, 'Preview/Vooruitblik', Rotterdam, Netherlands
 De Brakke Grond, 'Embodiment', Amsterdam, Netherlands

2000

Saint Michael's Church, 'Everything needs time?', Honiton, England
 3de Biënnale, 'Le fil rouge', Louvain la Neuve, Belgium
 The Drawing Center, 'Selection Summer 2000', New York NY
 Kasteel van Kuresaare, '10 Paar, Art from Estonia and Flanders', Estland, Estonia
 Kasteel van Poeke, 'Zomer in Poeke', Aalter, Belgium
 De Oude Warande, 'Lust warande, pleasure garden', Tilburg, Netherlands
 Ontmoetingscentrum Hoeve Vandewalle, '10 Paar, Art from Estonia and Flanders', Kuurne,
 Belgium
 Het Geuzenhuis, 'Kunst tegen Onrecht', Ghent, Belgium
 MAMCO - Musée d'art Moderne et contemporain, 'Le jeu des 7 familles', Geneva, Switzerland
 Galleria d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea, 'Metamorphosis', San Gimignano, Italy

1999

Witte Zaal - Sint-Lucas Gent, 'Art from SMAK', Ghent, Belgium Bildmuseet, 'Art from
 SMAK in Gent', Umea, Sweden
 Museum Ludwig Forum, 'Spiral-Kunstcentrum Sittard on tour', Aken, Germany
 Galerie CD, 'Mensen tekenen werken op papier', Tiel, Belgium Hallezalen van het Belfort,
 'Zich ophouden bij', Bruges, Belgium
 Galerie Nouvelles Images, 'Sense of Drawing', The Hague, Netherlands Antichi Granai,
 'Trattenendosi', Zitelle, Venice, Italy
 Abdijplein en Zeeuws Museum, 'Het betoverde plain', Middelburg, Netherlands
 Provinciaal Museum, 'In de ban van de ring', Hasselt, Belgium Vierkante Zaal, 'Dialogen met
 het waarneembare', Sint-Niklaas, Belgium Oda Park, 'De wereld volgens? België', Venray,
 Netherlands

1998

BRF-Funkhaus, 'Bildgewordene Wirklichkeiten', Eupen, Germany Kunstvereniging
 Diepenheim, 'Werken op papier', Diepenheim, Netherlands
 Kunstcentrum Sittard, 'Romanzero', Sittard, Netherlands
 S.M.A.K. (Stedelijk Museum voor Actuele Kunst) in Watou 'Voor het verdwijnt en daarna',
 Watou, Belgium
 Speelhoven, 'Speelhoven '98', Aarschot, Belgium
 Frac Nord Pas-de-Calais, 'Aspects de l'art actuel en Belgique', Dunkerque, France

1997

Fundacio La Caixa, 'Reality revisited - de Herinnering als verlangen', Barcelona, Spain

1996

Fundament Foundation, Wolfslaar, 'Shelter', Breda, Netherlands Gynaika, 'Zij-sporen: kunst

op het spoor', Antwerp, Belgium

MUHKA - Museum van Hedendaagse Kunst Antwerpen, 'De Rode Poort', Antwerp, Belgium
 Stedelijk Museum voor Actuele Kunst, 'De Rode Poort', Ghent, Belgium Nykytaiteen Museo,
 'Above / Below the surface', Helsinki, Finland

1995

Park Sebrechts, 't Zand & Speelmansrei, 'Sculptuur. Aspecten 1995', Bruges, Belgium
 Witte Zaal, 'La condition humaine, een confrontatie', Ghent, Belgium Galerie im Kunsthaus
 Essen, 'The Otherness - part one', Essen, Germany

1994

EV+A, Limmerick, England
 Felix Happark, 'Beeld in park', Brussels, Belgium
 Park Wolfslaar, 'Vista, Solitary Visions / Dynamic View', Breda, Netherlands
 Kunsthalle Recklinghausen, 'Transfer', Recklinghausen, Germany Musée des Beaux-Arts,
 Hotel de Ville, 'Transfer', Charleroi, Belgium Kunsthalle Recklinghausen, 'Transfer. Gent,
 Recklinghausen, Charleroi', Recklinghausen, Germany (Travelling Exhibition)
 Musée des Beaux-Arts, Hotel de Ville, 'Transfer. Gent, Recklinghausen, Charleroi', Charleroi,
 Belgium (Travelling Exhibition)

1993

Domein van Halle, 'Zoersel '93', Zoersel, Belgium
 Park Klinkeshöfchen, 'Kontakt '93', Eupen, Belgium
 Musée d'Art Moderne de la Communauté Urbaine de Lille, 'Escale / Stopover / Tussenstop',
 Villeneuve d'Asq, France
 Centrum voor Kunst & Cultuur Sint Pietersabdij, 'Transfer. Gent, Recklinghausen, Charleroi',
 Ghent, Belgium (Travelling Exhibition)
 De Beyer, 'Gent te gast / de keuze van Jan Hoet', Breda, Netherlands

1992

Hotel Navarra, 'Symposium 92-94', Bruges, Belgium
 Vereniging voor het Museum van Hedendaagse Kunst Gent, 'Synergie '92', Ghent, Belgium
 (Travelling Exhibition)
 Dhondt-Dhaenens, 'Synergie '92', Deurle, Belgium (Travelling Exhibition) Opus Operandi,
 'Synergie '92', Ghent, Belgium (Travelling Exhibition) Campo-Santo, 'Synergie '92', Sint-
 Amandsberg, Belgium (Travelling Exhibition)
 Galerie Joost Declercq, Ghent, Belgium

1991

Gele zaal, Ghent, Belgium

1990

Zeeuws Museum, 'Zuid-Nederlandse Ontmoetingen - Beeldende Kunst', Middelburg,
 Netherlands
 Paleis voor Schone Kunsten, 'Laureaat Jeune Peinture belge', Brussels, Belgium
 Various locations, 'Onbegrensd beeld', Maastricht, Netherlands
 Park Malou, 'Monumental III. Monumental 1990', Brussels, Belgium Kinopolis-Brupark,
 'Monumental V. Monumental 1990', Brussels, Belgium
 De Werf, 'Tempels, zuilen, sokkels', Aalst, Belgium

Orangerie, 'Tuin voor beelden', Ghent, Belgium

Deutsche Messe (AG), 'Ateliers d'été / Sommeratelier', Hanover, Germany

1989

Stadspark Sebrechts, 'Aspecten 1989, Actuele Driedimensionale Kunst', Bruges, Belgium

Bogardenkapel, 'Tekeningen door beeldhouwers gemaakt', Bruges, Belgium

1988

Bogardenkapel, 'Affiniteiten', Bruges, Belgium Galerie Fred Lanzenberg, Brussels, Belgium

1986

Fabriek voor Entartete kunst, Ex-fabriek Alsberghe-van Oost, 'Antichambre', Ghent, Belgium

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